

**‘HERE IS A PLACE OF
DISAFFECTION’**

**A DETAILED TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF
T.S. ELIOT'S POLITICAL AND SOCIAL
CRITICISM**

**A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH
IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY**

BY

ANDREW M. TAYLOR-PERRY

**UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY, NZ
2001**



Portrait of T.S. Eliot by Patrick Heron, reproduced by courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From my observations, all theses end up as attritional, but ultimately worthwhile journeys towards something more important than just knowledge of their subject area: that is, knowledge of their authors' selves. This is certainly true of this one; the personally troubled years it has taken have encompassed a couple of those mid-life crises that Eliot must have been going through as well when he wrote about how 'The pain of living and the drug of dreams / Curl up the small soul in the window seat'.

But what has made it all truly worthwhile for a mature student like me are the friendships I have forged along the way with an array of brilliant young people; space determines that I confine myself to acknowledging here only my succession of room 320 office-mates: Sam, Mary, Will, Sarah, Kate, Grubb, Jane, Emily, and Di, and my 'Foundry' student bar drinking cohorts mostly too numerous to mention, but especially David, Stephen, Mark, Corey, Andy, Andrew 'the younger', and Paul. Thanks guys.

I have been especially fortunate as to supervision as well. I thank Gordon for his wisdom and whimsy - I hope this atones for my unresponsiveness in Engl 308 tutorials all those years ago - and Rob for his positive support and forbearance all through my post-graduate career, not forgetting the many nights of laughter and liquid hospitality round at Totara Street!

Finally, I want to greet my two special daughters, Natasha and Miranda, and thank them for the constancy of their love, and of course, Dora and Ken; it's taken me sixty years to realise they are my very best mates...

Then came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in
time and of time,
A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call
history: transecting, bisecting the world of time, a
moment in time but not like a moment of time,
A moment in time but time was made through that mo-
ment: for without the meaning there is no time, and
that moment of time gave the meaning.
Then it seemed as if men must proceed from light to light,
in the light of the Word,
Through the Passion and Sacrifice saved in spite of their
negative being;
Bestial as always before, carnal, self-seeking as always be-
fore, selfish and purblind as ever before,
Yet always struggling, always reaffirming, always resuming
their march on the way that was lit by the light;
Often halting, loitering, straying, delaying, returning, yet
following no other way.

But it seems that something has happened that has never
happened before: though we know not just when, or
why, or how, or where.
Men have left GOD not for other gods, they say, but for no
god; and this has never happened before
That men both deny gods and worship gods, professing
first Reason,
And then Money, and Power, and what they call Life, or
Race, or Dialectic.
The Church disowned, the tower overthrown, the bells
upturned, what have we to do
But stand with empty hands and palms turned upwards
In an age which advances progressively backwards?

...

CHORUS:

Waste and void. Waste and void. And darkness on the face
of the deep.
Has the Church failed mankind, or has mankind failed the
Church?
When the Church is no longer regarded, not even op-
posed, and men have forgotten
All gods except Usury, Lust and Power

(Choruses from 'The Rock' [1934] VII.
In the beginning God created the world).

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT	1
INTRODUCTION	3
CHAPTER 1 - <i>AFTER STRANGE GODS</i> (1933)	9
CHAPTER 2 - <i>THE IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN SOCIETY</i> (1939)	25
CHAPTER 3 - <i>NOTES TOWARDS THE DEFINITION OF CULTURE</i> (1948)	55
CHAPTER 4 - EDITORSHIP OF <i>THE CRITERION</i> (1922-1939)	78
CONCLUSION	119
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND LIST OF WORKS CITED	124
APPENDICES	131
(A - SOME CORE ELEMENTS OF CONSERVATIVE OR RIGHT-WING POLITICAL THOUGHT; B - A SHORT SELECTION OF ARTICLES, REACTIONARY IN CHARACTER, DRAWN FROM 1930s ISSUES OF <i>THE CRITERION</i> ; C- NOTES ON THE CHRISTIAN POLITICAL GINGER GROUP THE 'MOOT')	

ABSTRACT

Rather late in my academic career, too late for a change in majoring subject, I realised that my study interests lay with political philosophy before English literature. Then I discovered, and became fascinated with, twentieth-century inter-war, or 'high' Anglo-American literary Modernism because here, so it seemed to me, the age-old intersection between politics and art had reached its troubled apogee. One could even go so far as to contend that high Modernism, its foremost practitioners sharing in a political disposition opposed to liberal democracy and its abettor, capitalist materialism, was first and always an amorphous political movement dissimulating as art, and that its most notable literary productions in particular, profound as they so often were, had as their prime commission the dissemination of an apocalyptic, anti-modern augury coloured by reactionary politics.

Of course, this conservative rendering of high Modernism has now become something of a critical commonplace and much recent study has been devoted to those Modernist 'leading lights' who never recanted their right-wing views, in particular, W.B. Yeats, with his rarefied aesthetics and his disdain for the twentieth-century tide of popular government; Ezra Pound, incarcerated (on the grounds of insanity) after lending treasonable support to Mussolini's wartime Fascist endeavours; Wyndham Lewis, who remained in thrall to Nazism almost until the Third Reich's demise, and T.S. Eliot, zealous curator of the hierarchical structures binding art and society alike. But it was Eliot, perhaps because his was the most philosophically trained mind amongst them, who maintained the most Daedalian attitudes towards the political and social forces in contention during the chimerical peace of the inter-war period and even the phase of postwar reconstruction which came after.

As said, a flood of recent critical texts has been concerned to probe the source of Eliot's and the others' political obscurantism, in Eliot's case variously finding it in his formative Harvard years, in his exposure to French right-wing extremism, in T.E. Hulme's mordant 'anti-humanism', in the Orthodox Christianity Eliot embraced as an adult convert, or in the intellectual temper of those inter-war years when no one, it seemed, could escape political polarisation. Yet, perhaps because of his multifarious status, still undiminished thirty-six years after his death as the outstanding allrounder in twentieth-century English letters and the undisputed bellwether of Modernism, his authorship of that movement's magisterial (and most astringently defining) work, his literary and social criticism and his midlife (mid-Modernism) conversion to Anglo-Catholicism in 1927, Eliot's reputation has somehow contrived to weather the revisionist critical odium that has been heaped on his fellow-traveller Pound, for one.

As to his credentials, if Conservatism is an ideology which preaches the importance of conserving prevailing political, social, and religious relationships while it insularly superintends indigenous cultural values and would shield them from incursion, then Eliot completes the perfect score with his resolute defence of a traditionally structured, cellular form of social organisation, his ardent Anglo-Catholic Orthodox convictions, and his veneration of the literary canon and linguistic inheritance of the West.

This thesis sets out, by way of a close reading of his two inter-war monographs of social criticism and his pronouncements as editor of *The Criterion* - the dissembling literary journal which became both outlet and anodyne for European right-wing opinion - to show that Eliot was assiduously promulgating a systematic beration of Western liberal democracy amidst the many minds willing to receive it, right up to the declaration of hostilities with the forces of fascism in 1939. Even at the conclusion of war, and by 1948, like everyone else presumably forsworn in the political sense, he was still hawking the same tidings, different in emphasis perhaps but scarcely ameliorated in tone, in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*.

I believe it is the subtlety and tendency towards divarication in Eliot's prose, coupled with that general critical amnesty which has elected to esteem the poet in him and ignore the political philosopher-*manque* that has helped engineer 'Old Possum's' relative immunity. To uncover his fixations, to reveal the ideologies which by turns attracted him, and to scrutinize the political accommodations he seemed to be advocating, this study approaches Eliot's self-titled works of 'social criticism' from the inside, that is, by way of a dogged textual dissection, however dated this may be as a methodology. Only an exhaustive, analytic approach which emphasizes the socio-political problems identified by Eliot and the options specified by him in their rectification can excavate the layers of meaning encrypted in these documents and open their implications to full view.

It has been my deliberate strategy to remain largely aloof from orthodox critical evaluations of Eliot and to resist as well the distractions of contemporary theory. Instead, I have tried to decipher the political Eliot by interpreting him as literally as possible, responding in the discourse *he* employed, that is, received socio-political terminology of the kind extant at the time. To refract and attenuate a body of social criticism as waspish as his through the contrivance of some literary theory generated seventy years later would only deflect its overdue scrutiny, and serve to maintain the singular political dispensation he has hitherto mostly enjoyed. Just what was Eliot, that self-mandated political and social commentator saying, and why? Rudimentary as these questions may seem, and faced as it is with the welter that is Eliotic criticism, this study's claim to legitimacy, originality even, rests entirely on their elucidation.

INTRODUCTION

(i)

In olden days a glimpse of stocking
was looked on as something shocking,
but now, God knows,
Anything goes.

Good authors who once knew better words
now use only four letter words
writing prose,
Anything goes.

The world has gone mad today,
and black's white today,
and day's night today,
when most guys today that women prize today are just silly gigolos.

So though I'm not a great romancer,
I know that I'm bound to answer when you propose,
Anything goes
(Cole Porter - title song from the Broadway hit musical *Anything Goes* [1934]).

(ii)

`Dethroning God, that [*fin de siècle*] generation found it impossible to leave the sanctuary empty. They put man in His place, which had the paradoxical effect, not of elevating human nature but of demeaning it to depths of cruelty, depravity and stupidity unparalleled in human history' (A.N. Wilson - *God's Funeral*, p.304).

In their Introduction to *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*, the editors remind us that `Modernism is not a movement. It is a term that masks conflict and upheaval and any number of contradictory positions ... the term [is] the convenient demarcation of a period and a set of concerns ... Modernism comprises numerous, diverse and contesting, theories and practices [*sic*] which first flourished in a period that knew little of the term as it has now come to be understood' (Introduction, *xvii*).

While respecting this rather stock assessment of Modernist ductility the following thesis conforms with my own assertion that crucial among that `set of concerns' was a profound disquiet over the sort of political and social trends apparently responsible for the growing instability - the world's `madness' of Cole Porter's mock-serious lyrics, or that something that `has never happened before' portended in the choruses from `The Rock' which preface this piece - in early and mid twentieth-century life. Despite what a

more guarded critic like Sara Blair might assert in her chapter entitled 'Modernism and the politics of culture' in the recent Michael Levenson-edited *Cambridge Companion to Modernism* about the movement's inhospitality to definition being 'Nowhere ... more pronounced than in the fraught issue of the relation of art to politics', I assert instead that 'high' Modernism was as much a premeditated *political* reaction as it was ever, as she and others might have it, some *aesthetic* or oracular response to a looming crisis in the Western project of modernity, expressed in, and compensated by, the production of cabbalistic art.¹ The decade which did most to define it, the twenties, saw not only the movement's formalist techniques established but a transparent proclivity for political and social inveiglement as well.

In the political sphere at least, far from articulating 'any number of contradictory positions', Modernism became, despite its time and title, undeviatingly anti-modern because of the disavowals of democracy and the intrinsic anti-humanism displayed in the writings and the attitudinising of virtually all of its founding practitioners, including the Modernist 'second-wave' of 1930s communist sympathizers. Western writers have, of course, confronted political and social instability and even apocalyptic notions throughout our long cultural history. However, the old conundrum between aesthetic withdrawal and doctrinaire engagement was perhaps never more perplexing than for the inter-war Modernists, where, as the critic John McGowan has observed:

Modernism can never decide if it wants to occupy the fully secular and political world of modernity that realism attempts to master or if it wants to escape into some separate aesthetic realm that is more free and more pure than the world of ordinary human making.... Yet ... The modernist retreat into art makes sense [only] as a

¹ If there was indeed a prevailing sense of 'crisis', what were its causes? In their Introduction to *1900: A Fin-de-siècle Reader*, the editors, Mike Jay and Michael Neve discuss 'the period from the 1880s to the 1910s, [where] we discover a parallel complex of crises grouped under the term *fin-de-siècle* ... The future of the human race, the apocalyptic possibilities opened up by science, the crisis of faith, the mass belief in the paranormal, the future role of women, the multicultural "global village" - all of these were worried over and dissected a century ago' (xi). And after the next three decades had witnessed the Great War's exposure of the glib meta-narrative of human fraternalism along with the seeming myth of nineteenth-century scientific positivism, ushered in the Communist Revolution in Russia and the European civil wars which were its aftermath, shaken to the core any vestigial Victorian faith in free-market economic Liberalism by way of the Great Depression, and introduced the widespread social anomie particularized in the stresses placed upon the hallowed social unit, the family, while all around religious faith continued to decline, it is hardly remarkable that by the opening of the decade of the thirties apocalyptic premonitions were entrenched and widespread.

transformative strategy ... Even in its most ethereal and self-enclosed forms, Modernist art rarely abandons its revolutionary intentions. The notion of an apolitical modernism ... is a fabrication of the American domestication of modernism in its university curricula, a domestication encoded by the New Criticism.²

Situated as this thesis is in the overmined ground of Modernist criticism, my particular rendering is an examination of the multiple roles of artist, critic, convert, and Conservative campaigner often simultaneously played out by Modernism's leading practitioner, apologist, and theorist, T.S. Eliot. I argue that the consistent impulse behind this diversity of roles and voices had little to do with the Modernist Eliot of art and literature, or even the Christian Eliot of Anglo-Catholic Orthodoxy; the stakes were for him nothing less than a belated enterprise to reinstate that ethically normative and socially moderative partnership that had traditionally obtained between Church and State, and the improbable re-establishment of a kind of latter-day feudalism alongside a fundamentally conservative, hierarchically curbed, political and social system that had been steadily losing ground, in Britain at least, for four hundred years and more.³

² In his *Postmodernism and its Critics* (reproduced in the current University of Canterbury Department of English Stage 1 American Literature Course Anthology, pp. 24-25).

³ There is the added spur of evangelism. All Christians are called to bear witness to their faith and to substantiate the presence of the Holy Spirit within them by the proclamation of the evangel. This charge helps explain why the many Modernist converts, newly minted in the Christian faith, became empowered with an inverted second warrant. The result was that the puissant disaffection with late-modern outcomes like humanism, scientific positivism, and liberal democracy which had driven them to find refuge in Christianity had to be deflected back upon the secular world. Their serviceable reasoning was that before any earthly Kingdom of God could be established, temporal affairs had to be made congenial. Apart from Eliot, the long list of Modernist literary practitioners who responded to the esurience of modern life by acts of mid-life Christian conversion, thence to Orthodox propagandizing, included Maurice Baring, R.H. Benson, Roy Campbell, G.K. Chesterton, Christopher Dawson, Graham Greene, C.S. Lewis, Dorothy Sayers, Evelyn Waugh, and later, W.H. Auden, while Hilaire Belloc, born into the Catholic faith and whose criticisms of Western industrial society and the rise of socialism were the most pentecostal and trenchant, assumed (with Chesterton as his deputy) a sort of self-mandated role of Orthodox 'emissary'. A.N. Wilson refers to the phenomenon in his book *God's Funeral* where he writes [Pope] 'Pius X ... died in the utmost gloom, three weeks after the outbreak of the First World War, convinced that atheism, mayhem and nihilism would engulf the world, and he was, of course, absolutely right. He would have been surprised, probably, by the marked revival of Catholicism after the First World War and by the mass of converts, many of them, such as G.K. Chesterton or Evelyn Waugh, minds of great delicacy and

Of no Modernist is the *knowing* crossover between art and politics more true than T.S. Eliot. I suggest that while a natural timorousness in him helped play its obfuscative part, the seeming oscillations between McGowan's 'fully secular and political world of modernity' and the manifold literary artefacts of that 'separate aesthetic realm' for which he is renowned operate on the level of textual surface only. A careful linguistic and structural analysis of Eliot's complete output of poetry, plays, essays, editorials, and 'social criticism' reveals, rather, that these two domains were in him *never* divided, but blurred into each other interchangeably as a calculated, dialectically persuasive strategy to generate a readership receptive to the firmly closed, reactionary Conservative authorial predisposition they all the while asserted.⁴

Perhaps early critical derelictions or evasions of this political Eliot were inadvertently caused, or facilitated, by his very style of discursive multiplicity and sophisticated manipulation (what the critic Jason Harding has called 'Eliot's habitual caution and subtlety') where, even in political matters normally so practical and temporal, authorial method and intention remain typically, Modernistically, masked. Such formalist Modernist techniques enabled Eliot, their past master, to achieve those 'oscillations' raised above, namely, to somehow appear simultaneously tentative and imperious, auctorially self-effacing on the one hand and importunate on the other, and as particularist and universalist, public didact and private Man of God, all the while stepping interchangeably between the roles of artist and political cum social commentator. The sum effect of these various dialectical strategies is the construction of a petitioning, multifaceted voice which draws its authority from a web of structural sources: theological, cultural, historical, philosophical, and social, among others, becoming a sustained authorial medium which establishes its prerogative to political and social direction.⁵

genius' (p.352).

⁴ See Appendix A for a short catalogue of elements of Conservative or right-wing socio-political thought.

⁵ Since Eliot's death in 1965 at the advent of the present era of late-liberal, democratic postmodernity, his art and his criticism, and (less often) his politics have been assayed in a welter of post-structuralist and historicist critical texts. After preliminary work by Frank Kermode and John Harrison with their respective mid 1960s studies *The Sense of an Ending* and *The Reactionaries*, the trendsetter was probably Christopher Ricks with his *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice* of 1988. (The most recent is probably Murray Roston and his *Modernist Patterns* of 1999 with its extended chapter on Eliot.) But *detailed* analyses of his political and social *œuvre* have been unexacting and anecdotal, as in Roger Kojewky's *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism* of 1971, or extractive and essay-length superficial, as in Allen Austin's 'The Social Criticism' in the Graham Clarke edited *T.S. Eliot: Critical Assessments* (originally anthologized in 1971), Peter

Tracing the well-trodden margins between politics and art, Eliot was able to draw his social warrant from a genealogy of artist predecessors ranging from Horace to Ruskin and even Sartre, all of whom held that art and society were inseparable.⁶ Iconoclastically, I contend that Eliot was different because Eliot the artist and Eliot the aesthete were always subordinate to Eliot the Man of God, and that these were roles, auxiliary in their turn, to Eliot the profoundly conservative political apologist. Of course, that sequence challenges the orthodoxy that religious considerations are paramount to affairs secular; perhaps the Christian Conservative turns out to be the most vehement of temporal reformers, or simply reflects the fact that my interests in Eliot are political, not theological. What does seem certain is that if the 'conventional' (and perhaps agnostic) writer is *inclined* towards a critical engagement with temporal matters, and the workaday Christian has an *obligation* to contend with them because of their Paulian enjoinder of proselytism, then the conflation of these roles will *covenant* the Christian writer, like Eliot and the long list of others already footnoted, to challenge head-on the affairs of this world.

Although as a thematic counterpoise to the poet's journey to religious creed Eliot's verse also encodes an unflagging obloquy of late-modern Western civilization, this study will deliberately bypass the poetry (and the drama) to consider instead his intertwined political, cultural, and religious opinions set out in three monographs under the collective publishing rubric of 'social criticism'. The work places categorization above chronology; consequently, Chapter One treats *After Strange Gods* (subtitled 'A Primer of Modern Heresy', first delivered in three parts as the Page-Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia, 1933, and published in the following year), as a rather *ab*

Dale Scott's 'The social critic and his discontents' and Cleo McNelly Kearns's 'Religion, literature, and society in the work of T.S. Eliot', both to be found in the A. David Moody edited *Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot* of 1994. Until the publication over recent years of books like Ricks's, Michael North's *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* (1991), Kenneth Asher's *T.S. Eliot and Ideology* (1995), and Paul Morrison's *The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Paul de Man* (1996), respected critics as diverse as Helen Gardner, Bernard Bergonzi, Fr. Genesius Jones, and Hugh Kenner et al., had preferred to esteem Eliot the cultural and literary savant, and Eliot the poet, playwright, publisher, essayist, and editor - anything but Eliot the rancorous political and social critic and sometime anti-Semite, whom they assiduously ignored. The publication of Anthony Julius's *T.S. Eliot, anti-Semitism and Literary Form* as recently as 1995 became a sort of literary *cause célèbre* by bringing these less appealing Eliotic singularities, the last named trait in particular, to any remnants of reluctant critical notice.

⁶ Inherent in the high Modernist literary project is, of course, an outright disputation of the old Senecan adage *litterae nihil sanates* ('literature heals nothing').

initio tilling of the ground of Christian beliefs and principles from whence alone springs profound and timeless *art*. Chapter Two is a detailed examination of the logical next phase: the socially binding compact that is ideally forged between Orthodox Christianity and orthodox *politics* as painstakingly adumbrated by Eliot in *The Idea of a Christian Society*, published on the very eve of war, 1939. Chapter Three considers *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (sketched, in Eliot's words 'towards the end of the Second World War' and published in 1948), with its presentation of culture as a sort of communal 'good'; that is, a rigidly apportionable asset to be shared among the befitting strata of a correspondingly divided society. Finally, Chapter Four, perhaps the major focus (and the source of any presumption of novelty this thesis may lay claim to because of previous critical relegation of the material), provides a scrutiny of Eliot's editorials while redactor of the literary journal *The Criterion* for the duration of its life between October 1922 (just months after the publication of *The Waste Land* - the poem appears in this very first issue) and January 1939. These are illuminative in that every one of several editorial protestations of the journal's political impartiality is straightway contradicted by editorial pronunciamientos and an ample range of contributors' pieces in which politics bestride literature, demonstrating as they do an as if compulsive hostility towards Western late modernity in general and liberal democracy in particular. And yet, as an authority like Michael Levenson judiciously reminds us:

If the social cataclysms left traces on modernist art, so did that art inform and to an extent *form* the conception of social life within historical crisis....[F]igures of nihilism, of degeneration and despair, circulate quickly both in the work and in the responses to the work. The loss of faith, the groundlessness of value, the violence of war, and a nameless, faceless anxiety - no one is likely to be surprised by such a list of disturbances ... [I]t is fair, and indeed important, to preserve memory of an alienation, an uncanny sense of moral bottomlessness, a political anxiety. There was so much to doubt: the foundations of religion and ethics, the integrity of governments and selves, the survival of a redemptive culture.⁷

This was why, for Eliot and the many others sharing in these manifold anxieties, vaticination became the only corrective for a bitter harvest of twentieth-century futility symbolized by 'the asphalt road / And a thousand lost golf balls'.

⁷ In his Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* ([1999], pp.3-4).

CHAPTER 1

AFTER STRANGE GODS: A PRIMER OF MODERN HERESY (1933)

(The Page-Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia)

An art that sets itself up as independently of the hierarchy of order is a *fallen* art; that only is an upright art which serves a divine order and the glory of God

(Theodor Haecker, *Schonheit: ein Versuch* [reviewed in *The Criterion* for July 1937]).

Out of the formless stone, when the artist unites himself
with stone,
Spring always new forms of life, from the soul of man
that is joined to the soul of stone;
Out of the meaningless practical shapes of all that is living
or lifeless
Joined with the artist's eye, new life, new form, new
colour.
...
There spring the perfect order of speech,
and the beauty of incantation

(Choruses from 'The Rock' [1934] IX. *Son of Man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears*).

So as to invoke some sort of cultural/historical superscription for what is to follow, the 1934 transcript of *After Strange Gods* opens with an epigraph in the Greek drawn from *Oedipus Rex*: 1. 460-462. Tiresias, a type also appropriated by Eliot in *The Waste Land*, speaks to Oedipus, translated: 'Go inside and think on these things, and if you find I have lied, then say I have no skills in prophecy'. And in stock Modernist manner, where Western culture is to be plumbed as a sort of repository of hermetic truths, the author offers an epigraph from the obscure conservative German theologian and critic, Theodor Haecker's *Was ist der Mensch?* (What is Man?), translated, *inter alia*:

This [modern] disorder in the human condition and in man himself - I speak of the threefold aspects under which it can be examined, the primacy of lust, the primacy of sentimentality, and the primacy of technical intelligence - instead of the only truly hierarchical order, the primacy of the spirit and the spiritual - finds its own distorted reflection in the literature of these days.

Pointedly, Eliot establishes his preceptive credentials in the subsequently-written Preface, informing his later readers (though not his original listeners) that these lectures 'were not undertaken as exercises in literary criticism'. He emphasizes that he therefore ascended the speaker's platform not as critic or artist, but 'only in the role of moralist', concerned to impart 'certain ideas'. His presence amid Faculty and student audience of what he salutes as 'one of the older, smaller and most gracious of American educational institutions, one of those in which some vestiges of a traditional education seem to survive' apparently encouraged the complicit tone of the lectures which followed. Again, the Preface, but not the original address, makes it plain that his generalised mark is 'a society like ours, wormeaten with Liberalism', one unlikely to have 'any future worth communicating with' and that his aim is to 'preach' not only to the 'converted'

but primarily only to those who, never having applied moral principles to literature quite explicitly - perhaps even having conscientiously believed that they ought not to apply them in this way to 'works of art' - are possibly convertible (p.13).

Prefatorially at least, Eliot's agenda has been explicated, and a largely secular academic audience which (however 'traditional' in its guest speaker's estimation), must have come to hear the literary lion, finds itself being addressed instead by the paragon, bearing the seemingly *démodé* yardstick of 'moral quotient' with which to catechize selected writers. If such a procrustean frame of reference based on moral conformation can be successfully imparted and his audience persuaded of a new measure of literary evaluation - a work's ethical quotient - then one impediment to their even broader 'conversion' has perhaps been cleared away. Of course, Eliot's 1927 conversion to Anglo-Catholicism was no secret, but the degree to which the Modernist artist had become hostage to the apostle in him is revealed in the recurrent theme of his address: the notion that the more 'moral' is the literary work, the more estimable it becomes.

Perhaps because this is, after all, the vestigial antebellum South, home of his friends and admirers among the New Critics, the first (Part I) of these lectures notoriously stumbles from one obscurantist provocation to another, with Eliot telling his Virginian listeners that the American South can still lay claim to 'some recollection of a "tradition" ' with its gentrified 'agrarian movement' bravely defying the god of economic determinism, unlike the North, doubly afflicted with the 'monotony exerted by the industrial expansion of the latter part of the nineteenth and the first part of the

twentieth century' and the invasion of 'foreign races' (pp.15-16). Freed as the South is in Eliot's mind of these detractions and aided by its welcome distance from polyglot New York, he hopes for the 're-establishment of a native culture'. Since he does not elaborate, we may assume this 'native' strain to be a culture contiguous with the values of the bulk of his English-speaking audience of Western European descent, educated, and titularly Christian.⁸ Eliot thus urges on his audience a consideration of the serious difficulties confronting 'the revival or establishment of a [melded Anglo-American] tradition and a way of life', which in his view merit 'immediate consideration' (p.18 - my insertion).

What for Eliot is 'tradition'? While he has much to say about it in other tracts, he defines it here as 'all those habitual actions, habits, and customs, from the most significant religious rite to our conventional way of greeting a stranger, which represent the blood kinship of "the same people living in the same place" ', although he is sufficiently the post-Bergsonian man of his age to caution against any 'confusing of the vital and the unessential, the real and the sentimental ... remembering that a tradition without intelligence is not worth having' (pp.18-19). But this is as far as any nod to an open society is allowed to proceed; the Christian Modernist has a reformatory programme, and Eliot's injunctions are soon on show. He urges us to discover 'what conditions, within our power to bring about, would foster *the society* [more than the mere literature] that we desire', and immediately furnishes his own prerequisites: 'stability is obviously necessary'; while 'the population should be homogeneous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate. What is still more important is unity of religious background' (pp.19-20, my emphasis). And so as to arrest the liberal economic trends of the past two centuries, and restore an 'integrated' hierarchical society in which village and city, gentry and technocrat play correlative roles all under the auspices of the Christian church, Eliot calls for 'a proper balance between urban and rural, industrial and agricultural development' where 'the centre of the family and the local community [become] the periphery of humanity entire' (p.20).⁹

Eliot has been at pains to elucidate his constrained vista on what constitutes tradition because his strategy, rather than invoke the more familiar

⁸ Even as familiar a Modernist leitmotiv as Edenic nature vs (corrupt) urbanity does not go unremarked: Eliot contrasts the journey 'through the beautiful desolate country of Vermont' with the descent to 'the sordid of the half-dead mill towns of Southern New Hampshire and Massachusetts' (p.17).

⁹ In a p.21 footnote, Eliot acknowledges those contemporary 'writers' whose doctrines have influenced him in this line of thinking; the first listed is his fellow Orthodox Christian, 'Mr Chesterton and his "distributism" '.

classicism/romanticism dichotomy, is to link tradition with its accomplice, Orthodoxy (defined by the O.E.D. as 'belief in or agreement with what is, or is currently held to be, right, esp. in religious matters'), so as to oppose, in the best Conservative way, 'its opposite, heterodoxy'. He believes that the right tradition for the inclusive 'us' must be the Christian tradition, and after reassuring his audience that he does 'not propose to lead the present series of lectures to a theological discussion', he proceeds circuitously to do just that. While these are supposed to be a set of addresses objectively discussing recent and contemporary writing, Eliot wants his audience to come to reappraise literature, not only for its complement of generalized 'moral principles' as first enumerated, but more pertinently through the monocle of a traditional archetype defined by Christian Conservatism, since 'Conservatism, so far as it has ever existed ... has been associated with the defence of tradition' (p.21).

With the parameters of a literary orthodoxy in place, we are told by the post-conversion author of Modernism's most groundbreaking work and sometime godfather of American literary New Criticism, that 'the artist's concern with originality ... may be considered negative ... I am not here occupied with the standards, ideals and rules which the artist or writer should set before himself, but the way in which his work should be taken by the reader; not with the aberrations of writers, but with those of readers and critics' (p.23).¹⁰ Consistently, Eliot does exempt the author, because 'at the moment one writes, one is what one is, and the damage of a lifetime, and of having been born into an unsettled society, cannot be repaired at the moment of composition' (p.26). The twist is in the charge now lying on the *reader*: we are henceforth to maintain a coherent interpretive position, furnished by that 'necessary stability' of unconscious *tradition* - 'a way of feeling and acting which characterises [*sic*] a group throughout generations' - and the maintenance of a complementary *orthodoxy* ('a matter which calls for the exercise of all our conscious intelligence'), and thus, interpretively blinkered, read with, or against the grain of the text according to how we find it. We thus have the singular prospect of erstwhile literary pacesetter assuring us that originality, authorial intention, and even categorization (no sensible author, in the

¹⁰ This points up Eliot's lifelong personal conundrum: the schizoid conflict between the artist/critic (by nature inevitably experimental and provocative) and later-life Christian theologian/traditionalist (by nature inevitably sober and hidebound). Eliot artfully acknowledges the inevitable result, that is 'an apparent incoherence between my verse and my critical prose ... [W]hile I maintain the most correct opinions in my criticism, I do nothing but violate them in my verse'. He goes on to claim that while 'one's prose reflexions may be legitimately occupied with ideals ... in the writing of verse one can only deal with actuality' (p.28). A licence as pliable as this allows him to dissimulate the roles of artist/social critic at will.

midst of something that he is trying to write, can stop to consider whether it is going to be romantic or the opposite' [p.26]) are all chimerical when counterpoised to that immutable cultural tradition 'which has not the means to criticise itself' because it bears unimpeachable credentials. This tradition is 'a by-product of right living ... of the blood, so to speak, rather than of the brain: it is the means by which the vitality of the past enriches the life of the present ... accounted for by habit, breeding and temperament' and thus goes far in helping to achieve (something coincidentally paramount for the religious believer) 'the reconciliation of thought and feeling' (pp.29-31). This explains why inculcation of the reader, the other half of the literary relationship, is so important; greeted with a superimposed interpretive programme like this meaning becomes contained and independent analysis occluded.

In Part II of *After Strange Gods*, Eliot goes on to apply these observations to three short stories drawn from contemporary English literature, all of which 'turn on the same theme of disillusion'. They are: Katherine Mansfield's 'Bliss', D.H. Lawrence's 'The Shadow in the Rose Garden', and James Joyce's 'The Dead'. Predictably for an Orthodox Christian, he finds Lawrence's story the least appealing because of what he describes as the characters' 'absence of any moral or social sense', which goes with his estimation of Lawrence as 'an almost perfect example of the heretic'. Not surprisingly, Eliot finds Joyce's story better because it displays an 'orthodoxy of sensibility' and fits his religious eschatology whereby we approach (as per the story's title) 'that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead' '. This confirms Joyce in his opinion as 'the most ethically orthodox of the more eminent writers of my time' (pp.35 *et seq.*). (Mansfield's story is exempted from this process of ethical divination because in it, 'the moral implication is negligible ... [A]nd the moral and social ramifications are [therefore] outside of the terms of reference'.) Eliot has a readymade sectarian explanation for these ethical gradations in modern literature. The cause of Lawrentian, and of universal modern disillusionment and amoralism lies specifically with 'the decay of Protestantism':

amongst writers the rejection of Christianity - Protestant Christianity - is the rule rather than the exception ... [E]ven agnosticism - *Protestant* agnosticism - has decayed in the last two generations. It is this background, I believe, that makes much of our writing seem provincial and crude in the major intellectual centres of Europe ... [N]othing could be much drearier (so far as one can judge from his own account) than the vague hymn-singing pietism which seems to have consoled the miseries of Lawrence's mother, and which does not seem to have provided her with any firm principles by which to scrutinise the conduct of her sons (pp.38-39 - original emphasis).

Eliot contends that the social, cultural, and spiritual failures blighting

contemporary English life can be laid at the door of scapegoats like Lawrence, degenerate end-product of industrialisation, urbanisation, and an 'insubstantial' protestantism. In this way, the particular failure of the ultramontane Christian Church to respond and adapt to the project of Western modernity can be sidestepped, and Lawrence and his debased type can be calumniated as both cause and symptom of a late modernity responsible for dragging down culture and faith in tandem.

From Lawrence, Eliot goes on to consider his Harvard mentor, Irving Babbitt ('for whose memory I have the highest respect and admiration'). Unlike Lawrence, Babbitt was 'saturated with ... culture ... he was thoroughly cosmopolitan' and most of all, 'believed in tradition'. With 'the very width of his culture, his intelligent eclecticism', the late Babbitt is commendable in all but one particular: according to Eliot, his 'attitude towards Christianity seems to me that of a man who had had no *emotional* acquaintance with any but some debased and uncultured form [of the Faith]'. Babbitt, 'the rebellious Protestant' is therefore condemned 'to try[ing] to compensate for the lack of a living tradition [that is, a practising religious doctrine] by a herculean, but purely intellectual and individual effort' (pp.39-40 - original emphasis). Two observations are to be made here. Eliot, whatever his reputation as modern-day savant, is asserting in a very non-modern way that intellection alone is not enough: as it was for the monastic scholars of old, human personality and cerebration must be capped by humility and the credo of doctrinalism and faith. Secondly, the bloated *individualism* and freethinking so characteristic of late-modernity is to be decried; for the conservative Christian, religious observance generally, and the devotional performance of the sacramental rites, are communitarian activities which cement the traditional values, secular as much as religious.

After Babbitt, Eliot's discussion turns to that 'pillar' of Modernism as he has been described, Ezra Pound. Eliot's Christian conversion had distanced him from Pound (just as it had cost him the reverence of the Modernist avant-garde generally), and this estrangement comes out in the modulated tartness of Eliot's remarks. Pound, in Eliot's mind, is the 'closest counterpart' to the late Babbitt, his 'peer' even, in that most dubious and tradition-adulterating of modern afflictions, 'cosmopolitanism'. Although he is granted the flummery of being 'extremely quick-witted and very learned' and is 'probably the most important living poet in our language', Pound's 'powerful and narrow post-Protestant prejudice peeps out from the most unexpected places'. Pound is 'attracted' to the right era (the Middle Ages), but for the wrong reasons, that is 'by everything except that which gives them their significance' - which is, for Eliot, their deeply superstitious, mystical dimension. This explains Pound's preference for Guido Cavalcanti over Dante 'on grounds which have little to do with their respective merits as poets' but because 'Guido [like Pound] was very likely a heretic, if not a sceptic'

(pp.41-42). Eliot's alienation from seeming allies like Babbitt and Pound turns on this matter of 'cosmopolitanism' (the characteristic, which, taken with 'moral quotient' or its lack, constitutes the peculiar modern 'heresy' of his lectures' sub-title) because to him, only an urbanity arrayed by the time-honoured spectrum of Western culture is acceptable, thanks to the centrality of the Christian tradition within it. It was the bona fide cosmopolitanism of Babbitt and Pound which encouraged them to look beyond the cultural battlements of Western Europe and both were avid Confucian scholars, drawing Eliot's sting: 'it would seem that Confucius is the spiritual adviser of the highly educated and fastidious' (p.41). While this may seem a curious censure coming from the author of the most culturally eclectic of all Modernist works, and a committed student in earlier life of esotericisms like Sanskrit and Indian philosophy and Buddhist thought (as he duly professes pp.40-41), the explanation once again lies with Eliot's conversion. Orthodox Christianity is a jealous custodian of Western cultural values and its own conformations of tradition; this was the very factor which drew Eliot to it in the first place. Above all, the Church has no room for any but its own ontological system; it is, after all, 'the one true faith'. To put on Orthodoxy is largely to put on the parochialism of Christian dogma, as Eliot was only too well aware; it is this ineluctable subjectivity (placed on the Christian by the mandate of the evangel) which makes his volumes of 'social criticism' so dialectically flawed. Fascinatingly, this renders them intrinsically anti-modern, but in their didacticism, eminently *Modernist*.

Eliot's thesis gathers momentum with a generalised reference to 'other vigorous prose writers'. For 'vigorous' read 'conservative', because what follows, all of it bequeathed to him by the late T.E. Hulme, amounts to a manifesto of reactionary anti-humanism where the hollowness in modern life and modern literature alike can be archaically blamed on 'the disappearance of the idea of intense moral struggle':

with the disappearance of the idea of Original Sin ... the human beings presented to us both in poetry and in prose fiction to-day ... tend to become less and less real. It is in fact in moments of moral and spiritual struggle ... that men and women come nearest to being real. If you do away with this struggle, and maintain that by tolerance, benevolence, inoffensiveness and a re-distribution or increase of purchasing power, combined with a devotion, on the part of an elite, to Art, the world will be as good as anyone could require, then you must expect human beings to become more and more vaporous (p.42).

The sternness of Hulme (precursor of that new, 'twentieth-century mind' which Eliot had first commended nearly a decade before) speaks throughout this extract, and the long list of Hulmean whipping-boys predictably comprises the rational Enlightenment, humanism, liberal democracy, socialism, capitalist consumerism, and even the late,

non-doctrinaire Aesthetic Movement.¹¹

The scale of Eliot's Orthodoxy is revealed in his dismissal of the mockingly secularised Hell Pound presents in his *Draft of XXX Cantos*, populated by 'politicians, profiteers, financiers, ... the English, ... the stupid, pedants, preachers ... lady golfers' and the rest, all of them types subsumable to 'three principles', (1) the aesthetic, (2) the humanitarian, (3) the Protestant'. Far from being a place of perdition this becomes 'an admirable Hell, "without dignity, without tragedy" '. For the Orthodox believer like Eliot, Heaven and Hell are a necessarily-paired antithesis, the faith in one matched only by the fear of the other; consequently Heaven loses its glory when Hell loses its horror, as he duly observes: 'a Hell altogether without dignity implies a Heaven without dignity also'. And this latter-day Dantean is indulging no drollery when he refers to the bodeful Christian Hell as having become a 'perfectly comfortable one for the modern mind to contemplate, ... disturbing to no one's complacency' (p.43).

Eliot next turns to 'the other important poet of our time, Mr Willam Butler Yeats' who 'had still greater difficulties to contend with ... born of Irish Protestant stock ... brought up in [the urban metropolis of] London ... his father adhered to mid-century Rationalism, but otherwise the household atmosphere was Pre-Raphaelite' (and therefore self-indulgently 'aesthetic'). Eliot quotes directly from Yeats's autobiographical *The Trembling of the Veil*, where Yeats, in his own words, deprived 'of the simple-minded religion of my childhood, ... had made a new religion, almost an infallible church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions ... passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians' (p.44). Eliot acknowledges that Yeats's is an interesting case, but berates him for endorsing the doctrine of Matthew Arnold that 'Poetry can replace Religion, and also the tendency to fabricate an *individual* religion' (p.44 - original emphasis). I have already referred to the 'error' of modern individualism, which, according to Catholicism obstructs, rather than enhances, the way to God, and for Eliot, tradition, religious and otherwise, co-exists with collectivism; what most irks him is that Yeats's religious yearnings and his search for a sustaining tradition were not gratified by the familiar Christian faith. Instead, Yeats found solace in alternative irrationalisms: mythology, mystical Irish nationalism, the occult, and symbolic preternaturalism. Eliot blunderingly affirms the otherworldly nature shared in by

¹¹ In a *Criterion* editorial for September 1928 he offered his estimation of socialism when describing (1920s) post-war Germany as 'pacifist and "Socialist" - socialist, that is, in that safe, humdrum, capitalist, middle-class way that is comforting to everybody' (p.5), while his opinion of humanism at around this time can be gauged from his editorial remarks to the July 1933 issue: 'Humanism ... is a fallen sister [in its time a polite euphemism for 'whore']; we cannot now speak of her in front of the children' (p.643).

Christianity and substitute mystical credos when he asserts that 'Mr Yeats's "supernatural world" was the wrong supernatural world. It was not a world of spiritual significance, not a world of real Good and Evil, of holiness or sin, but a highly sophisticated lower mythology ... [I]n its extreme self-consciousness it approaches the mythology of D.H. Lawrence on its more decadent side' (p.46).¹² When Eliot talks about Yeats's mythology as supplying 'the fading pulse of poetry with some transient stimulant', the true irony of Yeats's personal solution to that endemic modern awareness of perished traditions and extinct cultural matrix is quite lost on him. Those Yeatsian longings were met in the refuge of a revitalized mythology, which the 'fading pulse' of a dessicated and enervated Christianity simply could not provide. Although Eliot does allow Yeats's 'greatness against the greatest odds', saying 'if he has not arrived at a central and universal philosophy he has at least discarded ... the trifling and eccentric, the provincial in time and place' (p.47), this is merely the salutation of one declared obscurantist to another as in a *Criterion* editorial some two years later, where, in marking Yeats's seventieth birthday, Eliot was to write of him as 'the greatest poet of our time'.¹³ In reality, underlying Yeats's creative career was his lifelong search for that 'central and universal philosophy'; however, the *Weltanschauung* he finally arrived at and formulated in his last poetry was at a far remove from the stock Christian one.

Nothing if not dissentient, Eliot introduces last an unexpected subject-poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins. As he tells his audience,

you may be expecting that I shall produce Gerard Hopkins, with an air of triumph, as the Orthodox and traditional poet. I wish indeed that I could; but I cannot altogether share the enthusiasm which many critics feel for this poet ... [T]he fact that he was a Jesuit priest, and the author

¹² For an apprentice of Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, or occultism like Yeats these claims would have been profoundly contestable, and again, like Eliot's post *Waste Land* condemnation of the cross-cultural amplitude of Babbitt and Pound, are incongruous coming from a youthful devotee of Sir James George Frazer's were it not for their author's seemingly unabashed post-conversion revisionism.

¹³ It seems odd that in here acknowledging the immutability of Yeats, effectively the Modernist paterfamilias, Eliot stops short of that logical next step of recognising in him the only Modernist practitioner approaching himself in apocalyptic outlook. In *The Sense of an Ending* Frank Kermode outlines in Yeats 'all the elements of the apocalyptic paradigm' that are so germane to Eliot as well: 'There are the Terrors; the clerkly scepticism proper to a learned aristocrat confronted by these images of horror; a deep conviction of decadence and a prophetic confidence of renovation; and all this involved in the belief that his moment was the moment of supreme crisis.... This is the modern apotheosis of Joachism: the belief that one's own age is transitional between two major periods turns into a belief that the transition itself becomes an age, a *saeculum*. We ... are left with eternal transition, perpetual crisis' (pp.99&101).

of some very beautiful devotional verse, is only partially relevant. To be converted ... is not going to do for a man, as a writer, what his ancestry and his country for some generations have failed to do. Hopkins is a fine poet, to be sure; but he is not ... a poet of our time (p.47).

After all that Eliot has said about Pound and the others having cultural range and inductiveness without faith, we now find Hopkins criticised for having faith without cultural range and inductiveness, in short, for lacking worldliness. This is because 'in the matter of devotional poetry a good deal more is at issue than just the purity and strength of the author's devotional passion. To be a "devotional poet" is a limitation ... Hopkins is not a religious poet in the more important sense' (p.48). Eliot does allow that 'Hopkins has the dignity of the Church behind him' but this and even the incandescent, offertory tone of his work, which should have gone some way towards placing Hopkins in the company of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets Eliot most admired, like Donne, Herbert, and Vaughan, will not serve because it is

the struggle of our [conservative, Orthodox] time to concentrate, not to dissipate; to renew our association with traditional wisdom; to re-establish a vital connexion between the individual and the race; the struggle, in a word, against Liberalism: from all this Hopkins is a little apart, and in this Hopkins has very little aid to offer us (p.48).

Earlier, Eliot had criticised Yeats (and also Arnold) for seeking to replace religion with poetry; now Hopkins, transcendent though his work is in offering up praise to God, is at fault for not exceeding his brief as a mere 'devotional poet' eschewing the affairs of this world; in other words, for the shortcoming, unforgivable in the modern era, of being apolitical.¹⁴ He has 'little aid to offer us' because he is merely devout and not sufficiently doctrinaire to fight the good (Conservative) fight against liberal democracy. If there remained any doubt as to the calculated political permutation now being imposed on and by conservative Christians, Eliot's dismissal of Hopkins makes plain the need for a new, militant breed of believer because in the turbulent, late-modern era, conventional piety and the passive witness to faith are no longer enough. He claims to have shown how poets have entered and sought to appropriate the realm of religion; it is now the Orthodox churchman and woman, particularly the proselytizing Christian of letters, who must enter the political lists in order to combat the Great Enemy, liberalism, and steer Church and State back to their historical alliance. His use of the verbs 'concentrate', 'renew', and 're-establish' suggest a morally-rearmed, apostolic breed of

¹⁴ Surely this criticism of Hopkins is also chronologically unfair. Unlike all the others under discussion in Part II, Hopkins, a Jesuit priest, was clearly not contemporaneous, but uniquely Victorian. His lifespan was contained within his Monarch's reign, and he had been dead a quarter of a century before the first dogmatic phase of Modernism (led by Pound's 'men of 1914') had even begun.

erudite modern Christian, of a type I will shortly discuss when treating his *Idea of a Christian Society*, and yet Eliot is quite unable to point to such a paragon on the contemporary literary scene, unless, of course, he is subtly foregrounding himself.

Eliot concludes Part II of his lecture by restating his purpose. It has been to illustrate 'the crippling effect upon men of letters, of not having been brought up in the environment of a living and central tradition'. Since all of those he has chosen to appraise had been saturated in the environment of a living and central *cultural* tradition, what he is really imputing is their having not been brought up ('brought up' literally) in the central, Orthodox, *Christian* tradition, with its astringent social and moral norms.

Having coaxed his presumably liberal audience along the familiar Eliotic and Conservative pathways of traditional and cultural exposition to arrive at the centrality of religious Orthodoxy, in Part III of *After Strange Gods* Eliot is ready, like some Old Testament prophet, to visit some mantic fundamentalism on them. Here, he is concerned 'with the positive effects of heresy, and with much more alarming consequences: those resulting from exposure to the diabolic influence', no less. He opens by pondering on the paradoxical prevalence of blasphemy in such a Godless age, when 'One would expect ... blasphemy would be less employed by the Forces of Evil than at any other time in the last two thousand years'. It is his conclusion that blasphemy, since 'no-one can possibly blaspheme ... unless he profoundly believes in that which he profanes ... [M]ight now be taken rather as a symptom that the soul is still alive ... for the perception of Good and Evil - whatever choice we may make - is the first requisite of spiritual life' (pp.52-53).¹⁵ But Eliot lapses into medievalism when he says 'we should do well, therefore, to look elsewhere than to the blasphemer ... for the most fruitful operations of the Evil Spirit today'. Predictably, the Christian Conservative, burdened with the indelible stigma of Original Sin, finds the Evil Spirit most fruitfully at work in the uniquely modern development of humanist individualism, or what he calls 'the whole movement over several centuries towards the aggrandisement and exploitation of *personality*' (p.53 - original emphasis).

With the completion of this appraisal of recent and contemporary poets, Eliot proceeds in Part III to treat English novelists of the last one hundred years in the light of this 'modern heresy' of personality. Austen, Dickens, and Thackeray are excused because with them, personality ... was more nearly in its proper place', and 'they are

¹⁵ At least the poet in him has not entirely forgotten the tools of his literary trade, as long as some demonstrable link with Orthodox belief still obtains, however fatuous. One wonders if he has Joyce again in mind with his aside 'It is certainly my opinion that first-rate blasphemy is one of the rarest things in literature, for it requires both literary genius and profound faith, joined in a mind in a peculiar and unusual state of spiritual sickness' (p.52).

orthodox enough according to the light of their day' (pp.53-54). Eliot maintains that this emergent heresy 'creeps in with' his namesake George Eliot 'who unfortunately combined it with the dreary rationalism of the epoch of which she is one of the most colossal monuments'. While she is entitled to our grudging respect for being 'a serious moralist', we must 'deplore her individualistic morals' (p.54). But what he says next forms the *crux* of his whole address, and in its terminological exactness, the kernel of the Christian Conservatism that he was to distil six years later in *The Idea of a Christian Society*:

What I have been leading up to is the following assertion: that when morals cease to be a matter of tradition and Orthodoxy - that is of the habits of the community formulated, corrected, and elevated by the continuous thought and direction of the Church - and when each man is to elaborate his own, then *personality* becomes a thing of alarming importance (p.54).

Eliot next treats the recently-deceased Thomas Hardy, who, though 'he wrote sometimes overpoweringly well', displayed an 'extreme emotionalism [which] seems to me a symptom of decadence; it is a cardinal point of faith in a romantic age, to believe that there is something admirable in violent emotion for its own sake ... [U]nless there is [also] moral resistance and conflict there is no meaning' (pp.54-55). There is meaninglessness in Hardy, but Eliot could never have conceived of its genesis in a baldly inverted creed; the possibility that the despairing late-modern Hardy's world is one in which *God* has failed to keep the covenant and has abandoned humankind to an implacable, existential fate. Eliot teases at this by observing that Hardy 'will leave nothing to nature [that is, to benevolence], but will always be giving one last turn of the screw himself, and of his motives for so doing I have the gravest suspicion. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* ... he comes the nearest to producing an air of inevitability' (p.56). This fatalistic inclination of Hardy's is pointed up in his dominant use of landscape; an element which Eliot himself refers to, but hampered by his convictions, cannot rightly interpret. Rather than being a topography simply 'fitted ... for the purposes of an author who is interested not at all in men's minds, but ... perhaps only in men as vehicles for emotions', Hardy's landscape is instead the bleak, indifferent vestige of the once paradisaal Garden.

Eliot's Part III theme, 'the intrusion of the *diabolic* into modern literature' and his even more medieval fancy 'of a positive power for evil working through [literary] human agency' is his cue for reintroducing D.H. Lawrence, 'a very much greater genius, if not a greater artist, than Hardy'. Eliot reminds us of the 'deplorable religious upbringing which gave Lawrence his lust for intellectual independence: like most people who do not know what Orthodoxy is, he hated it' (p.58). Of course, Lawrence

could not have failed to offend conventional mores, and for the prim Eliot it is Lawrence's 'insensibility to ordinary social morality, which is so alien to my mind that I am completely baffled by it as a monstrosity'. But Eliot paints himself into a doctrinal corner when he claims that 'Lawrence started life wholly free from any restriction of tradition or institution, that he had no guidance except the Inner Light, the most untrustworthy and deceitful guide that ever offered itself to wandering humanity' (p.59). The discreetly-converted Eliot should have been the first to recognize that without that 'Inner Light' in one immanence or another, even the first step towards religious faith cannot be taken. Here, as elsewhere, so many of Eliot's difficulties arise from his attempts to retain the intimate character of Christianity (Christ was, after all, a 'personal redeemer') while seeking to proselytically emulate, in part at least, the modern success of doctrinaire mass political movements with their strident propagandizing. As he later wrote 'paganism holds all the most valuable advertising space'.¹⁶

Eliot signally fails to recognise in Lawrence an ally from the obverse of the 'good' and 'evil' correlation he has been making so much of, even as he accepts 'that for Lawrence any spiritual force was good, and that evil resided only in the absence of spirituality'. If there is one aspect of modern life Eliot has bemoaned it is the bankruptcy of spirituality, and he has already observed the spiritual power of Evil ubiquitously at work in modernity. Somehow, Eliot can overlook Lawrence's whole creative project - to offer tangible evidence that the human spirit (late-modernity notwithstanding) is still vital - while still managing to acknowledge how 'most people, no doubt, need to be aroused to the perception of the simple distinction between the spiritual and the material ... Lawrence never forgot, and never mistook, this distinction ... Against the living death of modern material civilisation he spoke again and again' (pp.59-60). Why, then, is the spiritual vision he concedes Lawrence 'spiritually sick'? The reason, of course, is that Lawrence's vitalism is of the pagan, non-Christian variety; he possesses most of the Eliotic credentials, except (Christian) 'tradition', 'intellectual and social training' (that is, the want of an approved class background), and, of course, Orthodox convictions. As a cultural movement, one of Modernism's objectives, following Romanticism, was to recover humanity's spiritual (if not emotional) component. Eliot, however, can find no place for a spirituality which arises in profanity or primitivism which is why, according to him, Lawrence's 'early belief in Life may have passed over, as a really serious [pagan] belief in Life [unrelieved by the hope of Christian redemption] must, into a belief in Death' (p.60 - my insertions).

The fact that of all those Modernists under review, Lawrence is the most fundamentally opposed to modernity's outcomes, and yet, with his 'pagan' vitalism he

¹⁶ *The Idea of a Christian Society*, p.22

is for Eliot the most disquieting, may explain why *After Strange Gods* appears to be preoccupied, and in fact concludes, with him. As its author acknowledges

There is, I believe, a very great deal to be learned from Lawrence ... [T]hat we can and ought to reconcile ourselves to Liberalism, Progress and Modern Civilisation is a proposition which we need not have waited for Lawrence to condemn ... I fear that Lawrence's work may appeal, not to those who are well and able to discriminate [those secure in their faith], but to the sick and debile and confused [the agnostic modern masses]; and will appeal not to what remains of health in them, but to their sickness (p.61- my insertions).

Eliot ends on 'a few words of retrospect and summary, partly as a reminder of how little, in the space of three hours, one can undertake to say about such a serious subject as this'. It is 'serious' because, as he declares, in this age 'of unsettled beliefs and enfeebled tradition the man of letters, the poet, and the novelist are in a situation dangerous for themselves and their readers' (p.62). Historically, we can now see that the subject was indeed 'serious', the situation 'dangerous', because that late-modern vacuum in social, economic, and political affairs was about to be filled by a perverted form of precisely the kind of widescale regeneration Eliot pined for. And if 'tradition ... must be perpetually criticised and brought up to date under the supervision of what I call Orthodoxy', little could he have known what kind of orthodoxical genie was about to be let out of the bottle. One wonders how the ultimate practical implementation of the kinds of social metamorphosis being encrypted here, delivered in the ivied halls of privileged 1930s American college life and which Eliot chose to embellish with his infamous observations that 'those lands ... most favoured ... [have] been moulded by numerous generations of one race' and 'reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable', must have come to haunt him. Doubtless such gratuitous asides, delivered in his first lecture especially, caused his subsequent refusal to allow re-publication of *After Strange Gods*, and little wonder; a matter of just weeks before this address Hitler had been appointed Chancellor of Germany and across continental Europe totalitarian regimes were already misusing unprecedented powers to foster the society *they* desired - societies characterized by a rigid stability and an obsessive desire to achieve ethnic and cultural homogeneity, carrying serviceable concepts like Eliot's 'unity of religious background' along with them for the ride. Ideas and utterances like these soon became transfigured into anti-fraternal, genocidal incitements with as much to answer for in the dozen years to follow as in subsequent 1990s iniquities in the Balkans and central Africa. Was Eliot, given his later embargo, simply incognizant of the potential for their gross misuse? Given that he rounds out his prescriptions with the directive that 'a spirit of excessive tolerance is to be deprecated', this seems open to doubt (p.20).

However, this is an academic audience, not a party-political one, and so Eliot's superficial purpose is to equip his listeners and readers with an extra set of non-literary criteria newly necessitated by modern conditions, since now 'there is no external test of the validity of a writer's work, we fail to distinguish between the truth of his view of life and the personality which makes it plausible; so that ... we may simply be yielding ourselves to one seductive personality after another' (p.62).¹⁷ He would have it that because as moderns we cannot help but subscribe to the 'cult of personality' we are naturally drawn 'to the *unregenerate* personality, partly self-deceived and partly irresponsible [which, unavoidably] because of its freedom, [is] terribly *limited* by prejudice and self-conceit, capable of much good or great mischief according to the natural goodness or impurity of the man [*sic*]: and we are all, naturally, impure' (p.63 - original emphases). These novel 'standards of criticism, not ordinarily in use, which we may apply to whatever is offered to us as works of philosophy or of art, which might help to render them *safer and more profitable* to us' [my emphasis], will henceforth require us to assess firstly the rectitude of an author, and presumably measure a work according to what we might call his or her 'Orthodoxy quotient'. But it follows that to do that, we must first learn to refract literature (and life in general) through an Orthodox lens.¹⁸

Purporting to foster an alternative means of literary appreciation to mere formalist criticism, as framed by (something his original listeners were not given the advantage of knowing) a 'moralist', *After Strange Gods* is revealed as a circuitous bulletin of systematized Christian propaganda and Conservative cajolery. Its argument seems to be a neatly reductive one: culture (in this instance, literature) which has the 'right' moral constituent can do most to stabilize society and influence it for the better; only a society which is changelessly Conservative in character can safeguard the Orthodox Christian values from which this ethical tenor reliably arises; ergo, Conservatism and

¹⁷ The selfsame thesis was restated at the beginning of his essay 'Religion and Literature' of 1935, viz., 'Literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint' (*Selected Essays*, p. 388); in other words, the newest literature should be gauged with the aid of the oldest measure. And observe the reflexive irony blithely sailed over with the phrase 'the truth of his view of life and the personality which makes it plausible'.

¹⁸ There is a marked contradiction here with what he had written a decade earlier about how the critic 'should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks - tares to which we are all subject - and compose his differences with as many of his fellows as possible, in the common pursuit of true judgement' ('The Function of Criticism', *Selected Essays*, p.25). Now that it is the post-conversion Eliot who speaks, the preemption of readership autonomy through the instauration of an Orthodox Christian interpretive template is seemingly justified.

Christianity, working in tandem, ensure the best literature and the best society.

So as to assert doctrinal Christian authority most patently, Eliot ends by giving God the last word in discrediting the controverting, modern, human agent:

Woe unto the foolish prophets, that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing! O Israel, thy prophets have been like foxes in the waste places ... And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?

CHAPTER 2

THE IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN SOCIETY (1939)

(i)

[P]olitics is most concerned with the societal norms that stipulate how and by whom coercive power shall be used in the pursuit of societal goals.... It is important to note ... that religion has an influence on politics. Religion is neither silent nor impotent so far as affecting political life is concerned (Ronald L. Johnstone - *Religion in Society: A Sociology of Religion*, pp. 140-141).

(ii)

I myself invincibly do believe, that, although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories) yet the life of it as a whole is mankind's most important function (William James - *Letters II*, p. 127).

The post-conversion 1930s Eliot, never one to pass up the opportunity of simultaneously preaching the Christian and Conservative gospels, first presented *The Idea of a Christian Society*, like *After Strange Gods*, in the form of three lectures, delivered six months before the outbreak of war in March 1939 at the invitation of the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. In his Preface, Eliot acknowledges owing 'a great deal to conversations with certain friends whose minds are engrossed by these and similar problems', though coyly he declines to name them, so the opportunity of gauging the strength of some sort of politicised Christian cadre would have been denied his listeners. We now know, however, that he was a foundation member of a recently-formed Christian political ginger group which had tentatively accepted the crude but timeless imperative of the first epigraph quoted above. This group called itself the 'Moot', and by the time of this address it had already convened

three meetings, all of them attended by Eliot.¹⁹

Apart from this forum, Eliot proclaims his debt to the authors of 'a number of recent books', including *Religious Prospect* and *Christian Polity* by the theological activist the Revd. Fr. V.A. Demant (whose *God, Man and Society* Eliot had earlier commended in *After Strange Gods* as well as in a *Criterion* editorial for January 1934), and *Humanisme integral* by the neo-Thomist French philosopher and fellow adult convert to Catholicism, Jacques Maritain.²⁰ (These texts had also aroused the keen interest of Moot members.) Yet, as Kenneth Asher has shown in *T.S. Eliot and Ideology*, Eliot always leaned more towards the brazen neo-royalism and staunchly conservative clericalism of French extremists like Charles Maurras, Pierre Lasserre, and Maurice Barres and their political coterie *l'Action française* (originally stung into life by the 1906 overturning of the celebrated Dreyfus verdict) than Demant's more typically English, accommodating theocracy. The outlook of Demant and free-spoken clerics like him fittingly lies, in Eliot's words, with determining 'the right position of the Church in a secular society', but Demant is mildly reproached nevertheless for seeming to acquiesce in the civil inexorability of modernity, that is, by 'appear[ing to Eliot] to take this secularisation for granted' (p.10 endnote). Eliot, more steadfast, is 'concerned with enquiring what it [society] might be like if it took the Christian direction', no less. (Because Part I finds him in full doctrinaire-Conservative flight, considerable direct quotation will be inevitable in what follows.)

It is a stock persuasive stratagem of Eliot's to cloak his dogmatism with equivocation; hence his initial protestation that his 'concern with contemporary society'

¹⁹ See Appendix C for a background to this organisation. (Certainly Eliot was far from alone in disseminating and publishing Orthodox Christian blueprints for the reconstruction of eve-of-war liberal democratic society. As Joseph Pearce records in *Literary Converts*, apart from the well-published Catholic convert, Christopher Dawson, and of course Eliot himself, writers of texts of this kind included 'certain friends' like A.N. Whitehead with his influential *Science and the Modern World* [1929], Charles Williams's *He Came Down from Heaven*, and Dorothy Sayers' *Begin Here* [1940]; Sayers in her turn commended Dawson's recent *Beyond Politics*, writing how it 'defines with great clarity the Christian view of the right relations between Church and State, and the relation of History to the standards of Eternity' [p.216 - my emphasis].) If Sayers' words sound uncannily like Eliot's, Joseph Pearce says 'there is no doubt that [Eliot's] play *The Family Reunion* [also published in 1939] and more specifically his book *The Idea of a Christian Society* were major influences on her writing' (*Literary Converts*, p. 216).

²⁰ In an endnote to page 10, he 'agree[s] cordially' with Fr. Demant's disapproval of laissez-faire mercantilism: 'The fact which renders most of our theories of Church and State irrelevant is the domination of politics by economics and finance, and this is most true in democratic states. The subservience of politics to plutocracy is the main fact about the State confronting the Church today'.

will be speculative, rather than politically practical; that is, 'not ... with specific defects, abuses or injustices but with the question, what - if any - is the "idea" of the society in which we live? To what end is it arranged?' (p.8). At this early conjectural stage he is disarmingly untroubled over 'the means for bringing a Christian society into existence' (while suggesting 'that in our loathing of totalitarianism, there is infused a good deal of admiration for its efficiency') but is rather 'very much concerned with making clear its [a Christian society's] difference from the kind of society in which we are now living ... demonstrating in particular, the incompatibility of Christian principle and a great deal of our social practice ... [where] much in our system is not only iniquitous, but in the long run unworkable and conducive to disaster' (pp.9-10). This recurrent, if grudging, 'admiration' for the 'absolutist State' (and totalitarianism, Fascism in particular, made much of presenting itself as a mystical, quasi-religious movement) may be due, for ardent modern Christians like Eliot and Fr. Demant, to its charismatic, if perverted appeal to the religious impulse, as Eliot duly ratifies: 'One of the causes of the totalitarian State is an effort of the State to supply a function which the Church has ceased to serve; to enter into a relation to the community which the Church has failed to maintain' (page 10 endnote). As this chapter will go on to show, Eliot suggests that Orthodox Christianity can still rectify these derelictions by emulating key totalitarian techniques, including organisation, proselytism, and even coercion.²¹ His by now familiar mantra is his 'primary interest [in] a change in our social attitude, such a change only as could bring about anything worthy to be called a Christian Society'.

Having disowned any applied political purpose, or interest in the sensitive matter of reaffiliation between Church and State, because this is not 'a subject in which the general public takes much interest' (and since in any event 'the public is never well enough informed to have the right to an opinion' [p.11]), Eliot proceeds to offer a closed-up outline of the new Christian State regardless. This will prove to be 'whatever State is suitable to a Christian Society, whatever State a particular Christian Society develops for itself' (p.12). Vague as this seems, he is more explicit in a page 10 endnote, where he describes the Church's function in the new alliance to come (and contra Fr.V.A. Demant) as being 'wider than only to "safeguard the individual in his right to pursue certain purposes which are not political purposes" '. The implication is that this 'wider function' must embrace the political sphere, and so Eliot's visionary Church *does*

²¹ The possibility of religious coercion raises concordances between totalitarianism and the Orthodox opposition to nonconformity and free-thought of the 'founding father' of French reaction (and staunch defender of the divine right of kings), Joseph Comte de Maistre. According to de Maistre 'man is only free in so far as he acts in accordance with the will of God. (In modern totalitarian nomenclature, for 'God' read 'the Nation'.)

have a political agenda. And, modern institution that even the Orthodox Church has perforce become, its domain has shifted from its primary purpose of the salvation of souls to playing its part in the workaday restoration of the entire temporal collective. Eliot acknowledges this, saying he is 'primarily concerned with ... not the responsibility of the Church towards the individual but towards the community.... [T]he Church's relation to *Society*' (original emphasis).²²

Eliot invites assessment of the contemporary scene alongside the proposition that 'a society has ceased to be Christian when religious practices have been abandoned, when behaviour ceases to be regulated by reference to Christian principle, and when in effect prosperity in this world for the individual or the group has become the sole conscious aim'. And yet the cause is not quite lost; he goes on 'it is my contention that we have today a culture which is mainly negative, but which, so far as it is positive, is still Christian' (p.13). For Eliot, there remains just enough vestigial Christianity to form the basis of a revival, a revival which will come about when the contemporary social scene is inspirited by Christian evangelism and authority, hence his belief 'that the choice before us is between the formation of a new Christian culture, and the acceptance of a pagan one. Both involve *radical changes*; but I believe that the *majority of us* ... would prefer Christianity' (p.13 - my emphases).²³

Eliot sets up the usual butts, 'liberalism' and 'democracy', as constituting those afflictions 'the Western world has stood for'. The first is 'ambiguous, and is now less in favour; but the term "democracy" is at the height of its popularity' (p.14). But he reveals more about the political compliancy of his brand of Christianity than he does about democracy when he says 'Some persons have gone so far as to confirm, as something self-evident, that democracy is the only regime compatible with Christianity ... [D]efenders of the [here explicitly German] totalitarian system can make out a plausible case for maintaining that what we have is not democracy, but financial oligarchy'. He agrees with the prediction of the growingly militant Christian scholar (and fellow Moot member) Christopher Dawson that the currently non-dictatorial

²² According to the *OED*, the English word 'religion' is of doubtful attribution but the favoured root is from the Latin *religare* ('to bind together'), suggesting the concept of 'group', or 'fellowship'. If so, the nineteenth century cliché, promulgated by Ruskin, Arnold, and so many others that religion functioned as a sort of social bonding agent has at least the stay of etymology.

²³ I have inserted this second emphasis because on the succeeding page, Eliot speaks of 'one class of persons to which one speaks with difficulty', presumably the convertible 'majority', 'and another to which one speaks in vain'; what the politically empowered Christian social reformer might do with the incorrigible second category is not specified, though there is no shortage of solutions to be drawn from the Church's history.

democratic states will inevitably be rectified by 'the advent in these states of a kind of totalitarian democracy' (p.15).²⁴

What Eliot refers to as 'ambiguous' Liberalism, for him a nebulous, ateleological movement 'controlled rather by its origin than by any goal ... and with nothing to destroy is left with nothing to uphold and with nowhere to go', is the real worm in the democratic apple. His protest follows the line that if we must have modernity, if we must have democracy, must they be leavened with that final contagion, Liberalism? Consider the reactionary diatribe he launches against the last:

By destroying traditional social habits of the people, by dissolving their natural collective consciousness into individual constituents, by licensing the opinions of the most foolish, by substituting instruction for education, by encouraging cleverness rather than wisdom, the upstart rather than the qualified, by fostering a notion of *getting on* to which the alternative is a hopeless apathy, Liberalism can prepare the way for that which is its own negation: the artificial, mechanised or brutalised control [political authoritarianism] which is a desperate remedy for its own chaos (p.16 - original emphasis).

Interestingly, by 1939 Eliot wants to disown Conservatism, as a superficial doctrine and empty political affiliation at least ('neither Liberalism nor Conservatism, which are not philosophies and may be merely *habits*, is enough to guide us' [p.17 - my emphasis]) because he now prescribes a radical outgrowth of Conservative ideology, that is, a transformative (Christian) model of cultural and ethical tutelage, working in tandem with a potential new ally possessing the political 'teeth' which enervated Liberalism and Conservatism have long since lacked. The groundwork is duly prepared:

What we are seeking is not a programme for a party, but a way of life for a people: it is this which totalitarianism has sought partly to revive, and partly to impose by force upon its peoples. Our choice now ... is between a pagan, and necessarily stunted culture, and a religious, and necessarily

²⁴ In an extended endnote to page 40, Eliot impugns Dawson's assertion that 'a democratic society must find a correspondingly democratic organisation of culture' because he fears the consequences for culture and organised religion alike from burgeoning modern democratic society: 'the society which is coming into existence ... is a lower middle class society ... those who sympathise with Mr Dawson in resenting the tyranny of politics, must direct their attention to the problem of Education, and of how, in the lower middle class society of the future, to provide for the training of an elite of thought, conduct and taste'. Manifestly unlike any such elite are the chattering classes; that modern social phenomenon of 'lower middle class society' condescendingly personified in 'the standard man legislated for and catered for, the man whose passions must be manipulated, whose prejudices must be humoured, whose tastes must be gratified ... He is the most numerous, the one most necessary to flatter'.

imperfect culture (p.18).

Since Eliot elsewhere describes fascism as 'pagan', he seems intent on closing down the options. But, he indirectly asks, should we fear totalitarianism? If it is the case that

the attitudes and beliefs of Liberalism are destined to disappear, are already disappearing.... If, then, Liberalism disappears from the philosophy of life of a people, what positive [what alternative] is left?...We are in danger of finding ourselves with nothing to stand for except a *dislike* of everything maintained by Germany and/or Russia: a dislike which, being a compost of newspaper sensations and prejudice ... [M]ay lead us to reject possible improvements, because we should owe them to the example of one or both of these countries (pp.18-19).²⁵

Astonishingly, with the brutality of Hitler's and Stalin's regimes already a matter of public record (frigidly dismissed by the 'compost of newspaper sensations and prejudice' remark), in the dismantling or displacement of liberal democracy Eliot seems to infer we could do worse than follow those exemplars.²⁶

These remarks, incautious enough with war already in the air, are ethically compounded. While he admits 'there are still other objections, to [totalitarian] oppression and violence and cruelty', we are offered the doctrinaire Modernist's consequentialist rebuff to the Enlightenment values behind Kantian deontological ethics which has it that acts like those daily taking place across continental Europe are wrong in themselves when he baldly declares 'however strongly we feel, these are objections to means and not to ends' (p.20). Surely most of his listeners would have wished to sidestep Eliot's use of the collective pronoun in that last clause and his unfeeling invocation of an antihumanism which would sanction the means of mass pogroms and purges to achieve the end of a 'reinvigorated' society absolved of liberal

²⁵ Very similar sentiments had been articulated in 'Last Words', his final *Criterion* editorial, published two months before (January, 1939).

²⁶ Why would Eliot be here quibbling with totalitarian political theories with their vitiated idea of positive freedom in asserting that 'totalitarianism can retain the terms "freedom" and "democracy" and give them its own meaning: and its right to them is not so easily disproved' were this not a knowing ploy to subvert blanket liberal democratic objections to such regimes? Similarly, in an endnote to page 19, Eliot refers to the self-styled British Fascist, General J.F.C. Fuller, 'one of the two British visitors invited to Herr Hitler's [fiftieth] birthday celebrations'. According to Eliot, Fuller, who in his own words 'places duty to the nation before individual rights'.... From my point of view ... has as good a title to call himself a "believer in democracy" as anyone else'. And in the same endnote but in a different context, Eliot refutes 'the implication that what is Nazi is [automatically] wrong'. But he got it more right than he could have known when passing off his cognizance that totalitarianism could give such fundamental liberal democratic meta-narratives as freedom and democracy 'its own meaning'.

and democratic excess; that is, one returned to Orthodox good health, not to mention racial homogeneity?²⁷

Eliot next attempts an audaciously reductive manoeuvre so as to persuade us towards accepting the belief that 'the only alternative to a progressive and insidious adaptation to a totalitarian worldliness for which the pace is already set, is to aim at a Christian society' by turning to a consideration of 'both what kind of society we have at this time, and what a Christian society would be like' (pp.20-21).²⁸ He believes that the disordered, secularised kind of society Britain now finds itself wrestling with is the direct result of its having been 'highly industrialised longer than any other country ... [with] men and women - of all classes - detached from tradition, alienated from religion, and susceptible to mass suggestion: in other words, a mob. And a mob will be no less a mob if it is well fed, well clothed, well housed, and well disciplined' (p.21). The problem for the Christian adherent in this kind of society arises not merely out of his or her minority status 'in a society of *individuals* holding an alien belief', it is more insidiously 'our implication in a network of institutions from which we cannot

²⁷ Lest his readers fear that a 'pagan' (totalitarian) state necessitates a wholly pagan society, a police state even, Eliot points to the example of Italy, 'a country which is still mainly agricultural and Catholic', where 'a compromise between the [Fascist] theory of the State and the tradition of society [still] exists' (p.21). As Eliot already knew, in fascist Italy and Germany, the only traditions of society still tolerated were strictly conventional ones; and in the sphere of organised religion, the 'official' Catholic and Lutheran churches alone.

²⁸ An endnote to page 20 is worth extended analysis because it delineates the range of religious expression Orthodox Christianity will not tolerate: all the way from Deism and pantheism to liberal Protestantism and Unitarianism. Discussing the essay contributed by the theologian Professor Wilhelm Hauer 'to a very interesting volume', *Germany's New Religion* (Allen and Unwin, 1937), Eliot is dismayed that many persons in Anglo-Saxon countries share, along with Hauer's modern Germany, the belief that 'each new age must mold [*sic*] its own religious forms'. Hauer, inheritor of a long line of deviant Lutheranism, 'objects to sacramental religion, because "everyone has an immediate relationship to God [and] is, in fact, in the depths of his heart one with the eternal Ground of the world"'. Hauer's rendition of German Christianity incorporates post-romantic transcendentalism (*a la* Emerson and Whitman), where, according to Eliot 'Faith comes not from revelation but from "personal experience" ' allied to 'something very popular in this country, the religion of the blue sky, the grass and flowers', so that 'The German National Religion ... turns out to be something with which we are already familiar'. This Eliot defines as 'the end product of German Liberal Protestantism, a nationalistic Unitarian[ism]'. And somewhat out of step with the ecumenical spirit of the 1930's, he drives a wedge between the traditionally adversarial post-Reformation Christian camps by peevishly reminding his readers that 'if the German Religion is also your religion, the sooner you realise the fact the better'.

dissociate ourselves: institutions the operation of which appears no longer neutral, but non-Christian'. In consequence, he or she becomes more and more 'de-Christianised by all sorts of unconscious pressure ... [I]n the modern world, it may turn out that the most intolerable thing for Christians is to be tolerated' (pp.22-23). Eliot seems to accept, even welcome, the conclusion that the only way back to a hale society ready to reassimilate Christianity is through purgation by an authoritarianism featuring those peculiarly Modernistic elements he feigns to abhor: political centralisation, ideological sanitization, collectivism, and propaganda.

Eliot's political enterprise in Part I of *The Idea of a Christian Society* can now be reviewed. Having comprehensively discredited liberal democracy and its variants as any kind of durable *via media*, he claims that to continue down the present path will cause us to 'merely sink into an apathetic decline: without faith ... without a philosophy of life, either Christian or pagan; and without art' (p.23). The purely *secular* option remaining (and one better, at least, than the aforementioned entropy) is the volitional embrace of the 'lesser' evil of totalitarian 'paganism' because, according to him, the tenor of the times is such as will likely draw the remaining non-dictatorial states to 'keep pace' with their extremist European neighbours, leading them to that oxymoronic condition of Christopher Dawson's 'totalitarian democracy' referred to earlier. Either way, the emanation will inevitably be

a state of affairs in which we shall have regulation and conformity, without respect for the needs of the individual soul; the puritanism of a hygienic morality in the interests of efficiency; uniformity of opinion through propaganda, and art only encouraged when it flatters the official doctrines of the time (p.23).²⁹

Eliot continues to dragoon his listeners with this socio-political endgame designed to eliminate alternatives to his own Christianity-mapped communal arrangement. Having reassured them that if authoritarianism in one complexion or another is imminent because modern society 'has become so desperate that it will accept any change', then 'A Christian society ... becomes acceptable after you have fairly examined the alternatives'. The worst excesses of political absolutism can still be averted or at the least alleviated, he believes, if the Christian Church were to be endowed with some effective measure of temporal superintendency, in other words power-sharing, through the agency of a more or less benign theocracy. In the era of authoritarianism that beckons, Eliot has it that 'the only possibility of control and balance is a religious control and balance ... the only hopeful course for a society which

²⁹ Better, he would seem to be saying, to have art which 'flatters the official doctrines of the time' than be without art altogether?

would thrive and continue its creative activity in the arts of civilisation, is to become Christian'. To drive the message home, Part I ends with a demagogic caution of drudgery and foredoomery: 'that prospect [the modern reversion to an unalloyed Christian society] involves, at least, discipline, inconvenience and discomfort: but here as hereafter the alternative to hell is purgatory' (pp.23-24). Presumably the proximate 'hell' in this metaphor is the fallen state of liberal democracy, while 'purgatory' is his euphemism for the range of extremist measures, including totalitarianism, inevitable in its reconstitution.

Eliot opens Part II with a restatement of the tripartite socio-political options before contemporary society. These are (i) proceed with the present 'liberalised or negative condition of society ... into a gradual decline of which we can see no end' (ii) 'reform ... into a positive shape which is likely to be effectively secular' (the dark intimations set out in Part I have somehow been tempered, yet how is this 'reform' to be propelled, except by authoritarian means?) (iii) embrace 'the only possibility left ... that of a *positive* Christian society'. This he unobtrusively redefines as 'a Christian State' while declining yet again to explicate 'the possible lines of action by which such a Christian society, and thence a Christian State could be brought into being' (p.25).³⁰ Satisfying his own query 'with what kind of State can the Church have a relation ... a relation of the kind which has hitherto obtained in England ... neither merely reciprocal tolerance, nor a Concordat?', Eliot offers the template of a state that is 'in some sense Christian' where 'real ... statesmen [are] confined to a Christian framework within which to realise their ambitions and advance the prosperity and prestige of their country'. But he then admits the cold draught of a late-modern verisimilitude which tempers even the Christian's fundamental ethical precept: 'they [the statesmen] may frequently perform un-Christian acts; they must never attempt to defend their actions on un-Christian principles' (pp.26-27).

If 'the Christianity of the statesmen' is not, like everyone else's, a primary consideration and if, notwithstanding society's 'Christian' nature, 'un-Christian' political acts are to occur (and never be excused on the grounds of 'un-Christian principles'), then as strained as the deduction first seems, Eliot's reconciliation of Christianity and late-modern state is to be bought at the price of a pragmatic Church which has learnt to adjust to the times by looking silently the other way whenever the shabby work of modern politics and quotidian social superintendency intervenes. Is the modern Christian ready to ignore Christ's universal admonitions and allow their church

³⁰ The unremarked fourth possibility - a positive, reformed, liberal democratic society as the post-war world was to attempt under Keynesian economic theory and United Nations auspices would never, of course, have been allowed by a Conservative propagandist.

to become debased as an accommodating puppet of the state (as happened in all the fascist regimes), merely to find some quasi-legitimate, or quietist niche for it? Eliot pins his faith on archaic theological restraints to confine civil legislators to a 'Christian framework' while comprehensively failing to identify the dangers of collusively realigning the traditional Church with the renegade, late-modern political state whose cardinal *realpolitik* imperatives will readily licence it to commit 'un-Christian acts' under the benison of a ductile state religion. Ethical relativism is surely an affliction owed to secularism, as opposed to the moral universalism of the One True Faith, and was a factor in the sundering of Church and State in the very first place; he, the Christian historiographer and canonist, author of a play about St. Thomas á Becket which highlighted the pre-eminence of the Church's principles over the State's machinations, should have been most mindful of the undeviating witness and consequent martyrdom of Becket and other Christian divines like More and Cranmer, and the Protestants Ridley and Latimer.

Enlarging on the nature of these modern 'statesmen', Eliot does not expect, like his ancient progenitor, Plato,

the rulers of a Christian State to be philosophers, *or to be able to keep before their minds at every moment of decision the maxim that the life of virtue is the purpose of human society* ... they would have received a Christian education.... A Christian education would primarily train people to be able to think in Christian categories, *though it would not compel belief* ... And a skeptical or indifferent statesman, working within a Christian frame, might be more effective than a devout Christian statesman obliged to conform to a secular frame (pp.27-28 - my emphases).³¹

Turning to the composition of the 'Christian State' these morally valent rulers are to have jurisdiction over, one where the 'faith would be ingrained' therein, Eliot offers, behind a pungent if ostensibly modern accommodation of faithful and Pyrrhonist, the rudimentary segregation between the elect and the damned, for 'it is only from the much smaller number of conscious human beings, the Community of Christians, that one would expect a conscious Christian life on its highest level'. The remainder - 'the great mass of humanity ... should have some perception of how far their lives fall short of Christian ideals ... so that the difficulty of behaving as Christians should not impose an intolerable strain' (pp.28-29). Assuming it really matters, how the unchosen plebeians are to be brought to this insight is not specified, but Eliot has said enough about the relationship between Christianity-inculcated rulers and a Christian elite

³¹ For Plato, the Athenian rulers were to be schooled in philosophy; for Eliot, modern rulers are to be schooled in, if not reliably professing, Christianity.

fulfilling the role of ecclesiastical custodianship (describing this religiously-permeated ideal as a 'unitary community' and one in which 'all [social] classes ... have their centre of interest' [p.29]) to hint at an increasingly militant theocracy.

Eliot sketches the practical implementation of such a model by firstly reminding us that 'the modern system of society has a great deal in it that is inherently bad' (p.32). But the inclusion of the keyword 'system' here indicates more than a mere sharing in a reactionary commonplace; we are to be presented with the desiderata of an emendatory political programme. Thus far, liberalism and secularism have been identified as two of the major blights on modern society, and to the list can now be added urbanisation. This, and the social atomization of industrialised societies like Britain's has, in Eliot's view, been particularly destructive for Christianity and the traditional unit of the faith - the rural parish, that 'ideal of a community small enough to consist of a nexus of direct personal relationships'.³² While conceding that 'modern material organisation ... has produced a world for which Christian social forms are imperfectly adapted', Eliot dismisses both the 'extreme neo-Ruskinian view' of those who advocate a Utopian return to 'a simpler mode of life, [by] scrapping all the constructions of the modern world that we can bring ourselves to dispense with' as well as the expedient strategem of 'accept[ing] the modern world as it is and simply try[ing] to adapt Christian social ideals to it'. Neither will salve modern society; the first will not because even Eliot can dismiss it as quaintly futile while the latter 'resolves itself into a mere doctrine of expediency; and is a surrender of the faith that Christianity itself can play any part in *shaping social forms*' (pp.31-32 - my emphasis). This watered-down latter course (the acceptance of the modern world and the cosmetic adaptation of Christian social ideals to it) is diametrically removed from the 'positive' Christian society he desires, that is, one permeated by Christianity. But the unspoken *political* drift throughout Part II is from the first-step Christianisation of society where political rulers accept Christianity 'as the system under which they are to govern' to the point where the Christian Church, taking advantage of its monopoly of influence, would come to enjoy a legitimate share of executive power.

Having reached the point of elucidation as to how a modern Christian society is to be realised in practise Eliot employs his familiar safety-first strategy of careful

³² In his *Modern British Poetry, 1900-1939*, James Persoon quotes Charles Masterman (sitting Liberal member of parliament, later to become Britain's first wartime propaganda minister), where Masterman, writing in *The Condition of England* 'laments the loss of a rural world of "little red-roofed towns and hamlets, the labourer in the fields at noontide or evening, the old English service in the old English village church", a world irrevocably passing for the majority of Britons, four-fifths of whom [and this was 1909] now lived in cities' (pp.2-3).

explication without personal endorsement. He tells us 'We now reach a point from which there is a course that I do not propose to take ... an obvious course, and [one which] to some may appear to be the main thoroughfare' (p.32). In a drawn-out analysis, we find familiar Conservative denunciations of the kind he inherited from influential mentors like Irving Babbitt and T.E. Hulme. These include the fallen nature of humankind ('the evil which is present in human nature at all times and in all circumstances'), and the usurious expropriation of the modern capitalist economic system as inculcated by Pound's fulminations and the social credit theories of Major Douglas ('the hypertrophy of the motive of Profit into a social ideal, the distinction between the *use* of natural resources and their exploitation, the advantages unfairly accruing to the trader in contrast to the primary producer, the misdirection of the financial machine, the iniquity of usury, and other features of a commercialised society') [pp.32-33 - original emphasis]. Since 'a great deal of the machinery of modern life ... is not only hostile to the conscious pursuit of the Christian life in the world by the few, but to the maintenance of any Christian society *of* the world', modern Christians must prepare to abandon their traditional passivity, that is 'the notion that the Christian should be content with freedom of cultus, and with suffering no worldly disabilities on account of his faith ... [because] the Christian can be satisfied with nothing less than a Christian organisation of society' (pp.33-34 - original emphasis).

Operating in a still vaguely defined collaborative sense with 'the rulers', who we now discover have moved on from mere 'confinement within a Christian framework' to embrace the creed and thereby 'accept Christianity not simply as their own faith to guide their actions, but as the system under which they are to govern' (that political portmanteau word 'system' again), will be a cadre of religious watchdogs whom Eliot calls 'the Community of Christians', or more pointedly, 'the Church within the Church' (pp.34-35). Certainly 'the Christian [who] can be satisfied with nothing less than a Christian organisation of society' has a good deal of redressive work ahead of them. For this reason, the modern age requires a modern type of churchman - a soldierlike sort of Christian along the lines of the Jesuits - occupied as much with the business of social stewardship as religious revitalization; in Eliot's schema, these will be recruited from the ranks of 'consciously and thoughtfully practising Christians, especially those of intellectual and spiritual superiority' (p.35). When Christian 'rulers' and a Christian executive are so installed (interestingly, Eliot omits any clear distinction in function between clergy and laity) democracy has clearly been supplanted by a peculiarly *modern* form of theocracy - one where practising Christians operate interchangeably in both religious and secular spheres, and an unlikely twentieth-century *rapprochement*

between Church and State clearly becomes facilitated.³³ Eliot observes the characteristically modern 'close relationship of educational theory and political theory' (p.36) and notes with vague reproof the interference of 'pagan' totalitarian governments 'with the traditional methods of the oldest institutions' on the contemporary European scene. So as to excuse the selfsame thing on the part of doctrinaire Christianity, he distinguishes between 'a higher and a lower rationalisation'; naturally, Christianity inclines towards the former so that henceforth 'In a Christian Society education must be religious'. The educative component of Eliot's model 'Community of Christians' is now inaugurated: while it will include 'many, but not all, of the clergy', the prime qualification for lay inclusion is the predictably elitist one; it will thus be made up of 'clergy and laity of superior intellectual and/or spiritual gifts' (p.37).

What Eliot most desires is a community run on (preponderantly) Orthodox Christian lines so as to arrest the march of secular materialism and achieve social coherence. Apart from this, the writer in him can perceive incidental benefits, in particular, a place of proper relevance for 'high' literary and other art. He rehearses the Modernist posturings of Pound and Yeats over the contemporary decline in the arts, referring to a cause 'more insidious than any censorship'. This is 'the steady influence which operates silently in any mass society organised for profit, for the depression of standards of art and culture' (p.39). Those peculiarly modern scourges of commercial advertising and political propaganda ('the influencing of masses of men by any means except through their intelligence') along with modern manifestations like *laissez-faire*

³³ In chapter I of his book *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, entitled 'Two Predecessors', Roger Kojecky affirms how '[S.T.] Coleridge was regarded by Eliot as a "master of criticism" ... In a speech at a literary luncheon in 1955 he ranked Coleridge with Bolingbroke, Burke and Disraeli as classics of English Conservative thought'. Kojecky goes on: 'Coleridge appears at important places in Eliot's social writing. The "idea" in *The Idea of a Christian Society* was as much Coleridge's conception as Plato's, and the "clerisy", a term coined by Coleridge, was fertile in the ground of Eliot's thought' (p.19; Kojecky's other Eliotic 'predecessor' is Matthew Arnold). In Eliot's new Christian Society 'the educational system will be formed according to Christian presuppositions of what education - as distinct from mere instruction - is for; but the [teaching] personnel will inevitably be mixed ... The mixture will include persons of exceptional ability who may be indifferent or [even] disbelieving; there will be room for a proportion of other persons professing other faiths than Christianity. *The limitations imposed upon such persons would be similar to those imposed by social necessity upon the politician* who, without being able to believe the Christian faith, yet has abilities to offer in the public service, with which his country could ill dispense' (p.36 - my emphasis). Eliot is obliged to make these loose concessions because of his meritocratic instincts, but one is left to wonder just how far agnostic teachers and sceptical politicians would be likely to advance in a Christian-dominated political system like his.

economics, woolly-thinking liberal democratic idealism, and the erosion of social classes traditionally sympathetic to the arts, stand collectively indicted: 'The economic system is against them [artistic standards]; the chaos of ideals and confusion of thought in our large scale mass education is against them; and against them also is the disappearance of any class of people who recognise public and private responsibility of patronage of the best that is made and written ... Accordingly the more serious authors have a limited, and even provincial audience, and the more popular write for an illiterate and uncritical mob' (pp.39-40). As Eliot would have it, until there is an 'underlying [Christian, Conservative] political philosophy' which has transcended party politics to become an incontestable article of national faith, and unless there is 'a certain uniformity of culture, expressed in [a Christian] education ... and a positive distinction - however undemocratic it may sound - between the educated and the uneducated' there can be no 'continuity and coherence' in the spheres of politics, or for that matter, in literature and the arts. He sees modern secular education as breeding diversity and heterodoxy, and despite having remonstrated against censorship in principle, the contemporary intellectual situation, end result of 'a negative liberal society' where 'the idea of wisdom disappears, and you get sporadic and unrelated experimentation', leads him to insinuate precisely that outcome. Consequently, 'it might be better if they [in this case, American students of his recent experience] had read fewer, but the same books' (p.41). And since it is his belief that the general populace interprets the terms 'education' and 'instruction' interchangeably, the warrant is already there, according to him, for the 'inculcation of the political principles approved by the party in power', in other words, for a measure of censorship as the first stage in overt political indoctrination.

For Eliot, rectified social ends justify dubitable political means and while he may here shun 'The obvious secularist solution for muddle [as being] to subordinate everything to political power', as we have seen elsewhere, politicisation can become the cure-all for a despairing Orthodoxy as well. And a certain disingenuous flirtation with totalitarianism remains where, in this present, mercantilistic late-modern condition ('a state secularised, a community turned into a mob, and a clerisy disintegrated' [p.41]) subordination to a punitive political power of the contemporaneous European strain may be the only immediate solution, since 'a people feels at least more dignified if its hero is the statesman however unscrupulous, or the warrior however brutal, rather than the financier'.³⁴ Either way, we are reminded that 'it is only in a society with a religious

³⁴ Here he does come to confront the consequences of political authoritarianism ('the confinement of the clergy to a more and more restricted field of activity, the subduing of free intellectual speculation, and the debauching of the arts by political criteria' [p.42]), though remarkably, for someone writing in 1939, its

basis ... that you can get the proper harmony and tension, for the individual or for the community'. As already noted, while Eliot would not exclude non-believers from this religiously demarcated society (those 'individuals, who with great creative gifts of value to mankind ... will yet remain blind, indifferent, or even hostile' [to the faith]), in the vanguard nevertheless will be Eliot's Community of Christians, 'a body of indefinite outline; composed of both clergy and laity' bound by a shared identity of 'belief and aspiration ... a common system of education and a common culture, which will enable them to influence and ... collectively to form the conscious mind and the conscious spirit of the nation' (p.42).

A (Christian) religion which would do nothing less than delineate the 'conscious mind and the conscious spirit' of a nation would have assured legitimacy as a state religion. Eliot acknowledges that his 'foregoing sketch' is light on detail as to the relations between the two entities, and in Part III he sets out to establish their all-important interaction. In the course of this expatiation, we find the usual Eliotic, baldly manichean assertions; for example, in countries like America and the (still-colonial British) Dominions 'where the variety of races and religious communions represented appears to render the problem [of Church and State] insoluble ... they can only proceed either in the direction of a pagan or of a Christian society' (p.45). But a 'positive culture', like England's, must have 'a positive set of values', like Christianity's, and so 'dissentients must remain marginal'. Similarly, the Anglican Church will be able to play its decisively sacred and newly conferred social and temporal roles only when it (properly installed as the revitalized English state religion) commands near-universal adherence and 'the great majority of the sheep belong to one fold' (p.46). To that much-sought end, the establishment of a Christian society in England, Eliot, while not altogether abandoning ecumenical hopes, lapses into self-interested Anglican propagandization because 'it is this Church which, by reason of its tradition, its organisation, and its relation in the past to the religious-social life of the people, is the one for our purpose ... no Christianisation of England can take place without it' (p.47).

As to praxis, the Church of a Christian society would, not unnaturally 'in matters of faith and morals ... speak as the final authority within the nation', yet, in keeping with its not insignificant role in secular affairs, it is also mandated to enjoy the last word in applied ethics. This is why, consistent with its capacity to check executive power (that 'control and balance' referred to at the close of Part I), 'it can [and at times] should be in

still-greater evils: the curtailment of individual liberty and the imposition of state terror and sectarian persecution, do not make his list of proscriptions. The fact that here as elsewhere he leaves ajar the door to last-resort totalitarianism, speaks much for his sense of obscurantist desperation.

conflict with the State, in rebuking derelictions in policy ... in defending itself against encroachments of the temporal power ... in shielding the community against tyranny and asserting its neglected rights ... [and] in contesting heretical opinion or immoral legislation and administration' (pp.47-48). A Church with these and other formally constituted offices to discharge will be best fortified against organised modern religion's pressing fate - the consignment to secular marginalisation and eventual obliteration. As if this danger had not been the underlying theme of his lectures/text thus far, Eliot makes much of the consequences of Church disestablishment and 'the gravity of the abdication which the Church - whether voluntarily or under pressure - would be making'. Sequestration into the narrowly spiritual, or at best, ethically monitoring role, whether freely sought by it or peremptorily imposed, would rob the Church of all applied political function so that 'The effect on the mind of the people of the visible and dramatic withdrawal of the Church from the affairs of the nation, *of the deliberate recognition of two standards and ways of life* ... is incalculable; the risks are so great that such an act can be nothing but a desperate measure' (p.49 - my emphasis). Should the modern trend towards compartmentalising and dissociating those 'two standards and ways of life', the spiritual and the temporal, not be arrested, Western society will have forever lost its systematizing Christian character; secular humanism will continue unchecked and the final evangelistic opportunity of converting to God the 'lost' hordes of modernity, that 'great majority of people [who are] neither one thing nor the other, but are living in a no man's land' will be irrevocably lost, with results 'which we cannot foresee' (p.49).

Christian sage (and general anti-modern zealot) that he is, Eliot wants to see the fundamental dichotomy in human nature between mysticism and materialism that modernity had done nothing but exacerbate brought back to symbiotic health, against the grain of both essentialism and history. This is why he perseveres in the bald belief that 'the tendency of the time is opposed to the view that the religious and the secular life of the individual and the community can form two separate and autonomous domains' (p.50).³⁵ Empirically spurious as this claim must have already seemed at the time of its utterance, world events driven by distinctively modern political ideologies intent on a peremptory separation between the spiritual and the worldly domains were, within a matter of months, to render such a reconciliation forever impossible.

Eliot consistently demonstrates, sometimes subliminally, sometimes overtly, a

³⁵ Part of the evidence comes from totalitarianism, which is accorded a qualified endorsement for having, according to Eliot, the tendency to 're-affirm, on a lower level, the religious-social nature of society' (p.50). Totalitarianism, as we know, plays on collectivized mystical nationalism, the heady cocktail of *volk und schicksal*, surely the most debased strain of the religious impulse.

central facet of my argument about Modernism's essentially totalizing, anti-individualistic first principle. It is ever-present in his political observations, and since the way ahead to a new order of secular-political and Christian reconciliation has been signposted, in his mind at least, we can expect this consolidating impulse to appear in his treatment of religious diversity as well. As a *collective Christian* society is Eliot's temporal fixation, he is naturally 'convinced'

that you cannot have a national Christian society, a religious-social community, a society with a political philosophy founded upon the Christian faith, if it is constituted as a mere congeries of private and independent sects. The national faith must have an official recognition by the State, as well as an accepted status in the community and a basis of conviction in the heart of the individual (pp.50-51).³⁶

Yet the vexed question of precisely how and where to locate that 'Christian Society' in the inconstant world of modern secularism remains unsettled. The Church's track-record of quietist isolation and temporal assimilation offers no encouragement. Eliot, without historical instancing, refers to 'the lamentable results of the attempt to isolate the Church from the World'; also failed has been the 'attempt to 'integrate the World in the Church'. But what seems most extraordinary after all the initiatives so far advanced is his cautionary *contra mundum* that 'we must also be on guard against the attempt to integrate the Church in the World', presumably on any terms other than the Church's own (p.51).

While correlative pitfalls appear to beset the modern Christian Church whichever way it would turn, it is, according to Eliot, assailed as well by enemies within: 'A permanent danger of an established Church is Erastianism'. Presumably, the 'ultimate consequences of Erastianism ... are the most serious offences' because of that doctrine's reputation for subordinating the jurisdiction of the Church to that of the State and its condemnation of sacerdotalism (positions in fact, that were neither maintained nor denied by Erastus, a sixteenth-century Swiss theologian), and its 'ultimate consequences of ... [A]lienating the mass of the people from Orthodox Christianity, by leading them to identify the Church with the actual hierarchy [a reality which Eliot himself is elsewhere nothing loath to affirm] and to suspect it to be an instrument of oligarchy or class ... leav[ing] men's minds exposed to varieties of irresponsible and irreflective enthusiasm followed by a second crop of paganism' (p.51).³⁷

³⁶ Presupposition is another favourite Eliotic dialectical strategy; what he says here, for example, only holds if it is already conceded that (i) 'a religious-social community' of one kind or another is universally desired, and (ii) that the religious faith of that localised community/society (signalled initially by the limited scope of his title), suddenly extrapolated to enfold the nation outright, is to be Christianity.

³⁷ Ludwig Feuerbach, a student of Protestant theology before falling under the philosophical sway of

Flying as he is in the face of an incommensurable historical record, Eliot sees the need to clear away two areas of likely apprehension towards his proposition for a consolidated National Church. Firstly, in asserting that 'The danger of a national Church becoming a class Church is not one that concerns us immediately today' (p.51) he attempts to sidestep Christian Orthodoxy's background of Conservative political alignment, but since he remained a lifelong advocate of class stratification, and contributed nothing but ill will towards the Church's traditional charter of social amelioration by way of pastoral welfare, this declaration can only be taken at face value. Secondly, to accept his flimsy assurance that the danger of a National Church becoming a nationalistic Church, manifesting 'the evils of nationalistic Christianity', has been safely relegated to the past (p.52) is to subscribe to an *ignis fatuus* that the handful of tumultuous decades just past had somehow rectified a whole millennium of Christian antagonism historically impelled by xenophobia.³⁸ Eliot finds support for this claim in

Hegel, in turn spurred the materialistic humanism of Marx and Engels, resulting in Marx's famous obloquy about religion being 'the opium of the people'. In his *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) [translated by George Eliot in 1853] Feuerbach argued that humankind's ultimate fulfilment was transcendentally inherent; God was merely an externalisation of the human ideal, and love of God should be displaced by a universal love of man (what John Stuart Mill, in similar mind, called the 'Religion of Humanity'). Post-Feuerbach, Lenin, in a collection of essays and letters published under the title *On Religion*, decried the Russian Church for its complicity with the exploitative State, writing in 1905 that 'Religion teaches those who toil in poverty all their lives to be resigned and patient in this world, and consoles them with the hope of reward in heaven' (p.11); in 1909 he called for the revolutionary struggle to be directed against the triune comprising 'the landowners, the priests, and the autocracy' (p.34). In a 1913 letter to Maxim Gorky, Lenin wrote that 'The idea of God has *always* lulled and blunted "social emotions", and substituted concern for the dead for interest in the living. It has *always* involved the idea of slavery' (p.54). In turn, Leon Trotsky applauded the distraction from religious Orthodoxy offered by modern popular culture. In his book *Problems of Life* he wrote, to Eliot's chagrin (as recorded in the latter's *Criterion* 'Commentary' for January 1925), that 'The cinema amuses, educates, strikes the imagination by images, and liberates you from the need of crossing the Church door' (p.163).

³⁸ In his long endnote to page 51, Eliot's taking to task of John Middleton Murry's *The Price of Leadership* raises some inconsistencies that are worth examination. It seems strange that having read the first part of this book 'with the warmest admiration', he should go on to fault Murry for holding views that in fact bolster his own, viz., 'the real conflict that is preparing is the conflict between Christianity and anti-Christian nationalism' '[Murry's words, as quoted by Eliot], and for his belief [paraphrased] that 'the Church in England should be identical with the nation'. Murry's 'errors' (the first of which, by the raising of nationalistic and cultural consciousness among Anglicans Eliot himself was subsequently happy to perpetrate) are his emphasis upon the national character of the English Church; with this goes an

what he refers to as 'some events during the last twenty-five years [which] have led to an increasing recognition of the supra-national Christian society' (p.53). The events he doubtless had in mind were those groundbreaking international Christian conferences called to consider the role of the Church among modern political, social, and economic milieux, of which the most famous were the Stockholm Conference of 1925 and the Conference 'On Church, Community, and State' convened in Oxford in 1937.

While this admiration of Christian ecumenicalism and Christian internationalism ('no one to-day can defend the idea of a National Church, without balancing it with the idea of the Universal Church, and without keeping in mind that truth is one and that theology has no frontiers' [p.53]) was doubtless the reflection of its anxious time, it nevertheless seems curious in someone who, nine years and a worldwide conflagration later, was, in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, jingoistically committed to asserting the inimitable cultural characteristics of the home-grown Anglican faith. And again Eliot does not have history in his late 1930s corner when claiming 'supra-national' solidarity among Christian adherents, for whom 'There would always remain a dual allegiance, to the State and to the Church, to one's countrymen and to one's fellow-Christians everywhere, and the latter would always have the primacy' (p.55).³⁹ Supra-nationalistic, *class-conscious* cohesion had been exposed by the Great

opposition to ultramontanism, and in particular, his version of 'the new national society [where], if it is to be in some sense a Christian society, the Church and the state should draw together' [Murry's words]. Aside from the repudiation of the Roman Church, the only cavil Eliot can have with any of this lies with Murry's reversal of prerogative within his model of Church/state coalition; something Eliot himself has been most explicit about ordering. According to Murry (again quoted by Eliot), 'The main organ of this new national and Christian society is the *state*; the state is, indeed, the organ indispensable to its manifestation' (my emphasis). This seems altogether too fine a distinction over which Eliot can suspect Murry of being 'ready to go a long way towards totalitarianism' without recognising the same predilection in himself. Lastly, Murry, once again being quoted directly, calls for 'a renovation of Christian understanding, an enlarged conception of the spiritual life itself'. Here a level-headed ally is dismissed for his neglect (understandable in the modern era) of apostolicism, or of omitting what Eliot calls 'the rebirth of saintliness' to the end of inculcating true piety. In summary, Murry does not pass muster because while following a project identical to Eliot's he goes too far over to the 'enemy's' side and is accommodatingly 'modern' rather than intransigently doctrinal.

³⁹ The abundant evidence furnished by very recent European history which nullifies 'supra-national Christianity' is quietly ignored; in the three leading fascist countries: Italy, Germany, and Spain, the established churches colluded with rabidly-nationalistic political regimes; an outcome Eliot had himself foreseen more than a decade before. Writing in *The Criterion* in December 1928 of 'the position of the Roman Church, facing a Roman Dictator a few yards away', he warned 'If the Holy See accommodates

War as a Socialist chimera, so why should a relatively novel and minority-subscribed inter-war Christian concordance prove any different? Once again, Eliot was so soon to be refuted by political events played out on a world stage where national churches were all too ready to put on their old guise of chauvinism and concur in the pitting of Christian against Christian at the bidding of the modern State.

The final, Part IV, of *The Idea of a Christian Society* opens with the regular Eliotic strategy of declinature. Despite the invariably reactionary models of political organisation that have been outlined as decreed political rearrangements or even as compatible political partners for the new revitalized Christianity, he now draws back, dismissing (his title notwithstanding) any expectation 'that the form of political organisation of a Christian State [should] come within the scope of this discussion' (p.57). That the 'idea' of a conceptual Christian society (and Eliot has hitherto been unreserved in extrapolating 'society' into the State at large) can be aired without including, in this mid-twentieth of all centuries, a considered treatise on the political organisation of that selfsame society cum State would seem to obviate all that has gone before, were it not in fact the case that gradations of Rightist politics have been subtly commended throughout. Politically non-specific or non-aligned as Eliot may in one breath pretend, we can in his very next begin crossing democracy off any list of ratified political systems because 'We have no assurance that a democratic regime might not be as inimical to Christianity in practice, as another [inferentially the 'mere' spectre of totalitarianism] might be in theory'. The prime instance of this sort of dubitable democracy is, not unnaturally, the one closest to home - Britain's - and 'those who are convinced that the present [democratic] form of government of Britain is the one most suitable for any Christian people, should ask themselves whether they are confusing a Christian society with a society in which *individual Christianity* is tolerated' (p.58 - my emphasis).⁴⁰

The ruinous state of Britain's failed modern democracy is pointed up in such Conservatively-beheld 'evils' as [rural] 'depopulation, mal-nutrition [*sic*], moral deterioration, [and] the decay of agriculture' (p.58). Worse yet is the promotion of any

itself too well with the temporal power, it must be prepared for the suspicion (however unjust) of becoming merely another National Church; if it cannot accommodate itself at all, it must face many embarrassments and vexations.... The Roman Church is certainly passing through a difficult and dangerous political channel'.

⁴⁰ Turning this challenge around raises the question of whether the real Eliotic 'black mark' against democracy is precisely that it is the political system most robustly inoculated against collectivism. Such collectivism takes in Eliot's brand of militant and organic Christianity, not to mention the sorts of homogeneous politics which he, with his reactionary anguish, can never quite bring himself to disavow.

kind of Christianity which arises in widespread social benefaction rather than in personal piety - a popular Christianity embraced 'not because it is true, but because it might be beneficial'. Similarly, Eliot dismisses the 'folly' and 'hysteria' of 'a wave of [late 1938 British] revivalism and moral re-armament where 'The Christianity expressed has been vague, [because] the religious fervour has been a fervour for democracy' (pp.58-59). A jealous religious guardianship causes him to fret at the possibility that these expressions of misplaced philanthropic zeal will debase Christian belief and practice and 'engender nothing better than a disguised and peculiarly sanctimonious nationalism, accelerating our progress towards the paganism which we say we abhor'. A further secular pitfall awaits with what he calls the 'very dangerous inversion' of justifying Christianity 'because it provides a foundation of morality, instead of showing the necessity of Christian morality from the truth of Christianity' (p.59).⁴¹ What Eliot is traducing here is the modern intrusion of moral utility into the recondite nature of Orthodox belief, bypassing what he regards as Christianity's fundamental hallmark - the assimilation of the Word and the Faith. Yet this is not to dismiss morality and its serviceable potential entirely, where once again, authoritarian regimes have largely outshone democratic ones: 'we may reflect that a good deal of the attention of the totalitarian states has been devoted, with a steadiness of purpose not always found in democracies, to providing their national life with a foundation of morality - the wrong kind perhaps, but a good deal more of it'.⁴² It would seem from this that Eliot prefers totalitarian inculcations of public 'morality' to no moral guidance at all, or to the laxity which attends moral impartation in the democracies because 'It is not enthusiasm, but dogma, that differentiates a Christian from a pagan society' (p.59). The word-choice 'dogma' here seems unfortunate; that two such antithetical types of society should be linked in their fervidity and distinguishable only in their articles of

⁴¹ This is amplified in an endnote to page 58 where Eliot is 'alarmed' by 'the possibility of gradually adapting our religion to fit our secular aims - *some* of which may be worthy aims, but none of which will be supervised by a supernatural measure'. The priority of supernatural stewardship may explain why throughout this text (as elsewhere) he has no qualms over the opposite, viz., adapting our secular democracy to fit our (dogmatic) religious aims.

⁴² In the same page 58 endnote, he observes 'the efficiency of the [fascist] German [mystical-religious] machine, and [how] we perceive that we cannot emulate it without a kind of religious enthusiasm'. In trying to separate pseudo-religious, nationalistic ardour from the 'real' thing ('Moral re-armament will provide the enthusiasm, and be the most useful kind of political drug - that is to say, having the potency at once of a stimulant and a narcotic: but it will supply this function to the detriment of our religion') he blurs rather than enhances the distinction, and goes close to ending up in the lap of Marxist-Leninism with its cynical interpretations of religious historiography.

faith lends Christianity a peculiarly modern, conformably doctrinaire aspect that surely erodes the permanency he wished to claim for it.

In his concluding remarks, Eliot stresses those particular aspects of reactionary late-modern political organisation which must inevitably inform Orthodox Christianity if it is to attempt an organised bid for temporal relevance and social influence. These include collectivism, where his Christian society will be made up of ordinary *men*. Fascism was, not least, a celebration of fraternal male brio and its newsreel images of goosestepping phalanxes and political street violence was graven in the British national consciousness. This seems the likely innuendo behind Eliot's 'incidental' caution against the supposition that those in the Christian vanguard comprise 'merely the nicest, most intelligent and public-spirited of the upper middle class' (p.61).⁴³

Qualifying for membership of Eliot's resolute new Christian society will be those 'whose Christianity is communal before being individual', and those who are idealistically driven and Utopian, for the reason that 'whatever reform or revolution we [Christians] carry out, the result will always be a sordid travesty of what human society should be'. Most importantly, they will be conformable, because 'Any human scheme for society is realised only when the great mass of humanity has become adapted to it' (p.59).⁴⁴ All of these attributes (collectivism, idealism, and obedience) were the hallmarks of contemporary European totalitarianism and are here being submitted as prerequisites to effecting real social, political, and religious change against the grain of torpor in contemporary English-speaking societies. These kinds of imperative are seemingly unavoidable because 'the overwhelming pressure of mediocrity, sluggish and indomitable as a glacier, will mitigate the most violent, and depress the most exalted revolution' (p.60). (For the same reason, Eliot tells us, even if a Christian society should succeed, it would need to be on its guard against recidivism, and 'would require constant reform'.)

After what can be read as a nod in the direction of yet another (Nazi) totalitarian

⁴³ Various critics, including Andreas Huyssen, have observed how Modernism exhibits a 'powerful masculinist mystique'. And as the mid-1930s violence towards dissenters of Mosley's British Union of Fascists had graphically shown in the course of events like the Olympia rally of June 1934 and the public march down Cable Street in the East End, the established Church did not have far to look for pugnacious allies.

⁴⁴ Eliot specifies just one distinctly non-militant, quondam element in his new Christian society: the life of monastic retirement. There will be 'a *respect* for the religious life, for the life of prayer and contemplation, and for those who attempt to practice it.... [T]he ordinary man [*sic*] would need the opportunity to know that the religious life existed ... would need to recognise the profession of those who have abandoned the world' (p.60 - original emphasis).

practice - eugenic birth control ('It would perhaps be more natural, as well as in better conformity with the Will of God, if there were more celibates and those who were married had larger families' [p.61]) - Eliot puts on the mantle of Orthodox prophet to set about capitalist modernity's fundamental profit principle:

We are being made aware that the organisation of society on the principle of private profit ... is leading both to the deformation of humanity by unregulated industrialism, and to the exhaustion of natural resources ... [I] mean ... that a wrong attitude towards nature implies, somewhere, a wrong attitude towards God, and that the consequence is an inevitable doom. For a long enough time we have believed in nothing but the values arising in a mechanised, commercialised, urbanised way of life: it would be as well for us to face the permanent conditions upon which God allows us to live upon this planet (pp.61-62).

To this is affixed the reactionary Christian's mistrust in material improvement and in the humanist meta-narrative of ineluctable social progress: 'We have been accustomed to regard "progress" as always integral; and have yet to learn that it is only by an effort and a discipline, greater than society has yet seen the need of imposing upon itself, that material knowledge and power is gained without loss of spiritual knowledge and power'. But Eliot's only solutions for this spiritual paucity are either primordial: 'We need to know how to see the world as the Christian Fathers [presumably the prophets and the apostles] saw it', or they are woefully unmodern in their irrational medievalism: 'We need to recover the sense of religious fear, so that it may be overcome by religious hope' (p.62). These pinings for discarded spiritual 'knowledge' along with the retrieval of devoutness express Orthodox Christian nostalgia for what had always been the righteously-ordered ranking of the spiritual over the temporal. Its reinvestiture was doomed, as Eliot so well knew, while the once patronal bond between Church and State remained in its uniquely late-modern abeyance.⁴⁵

This awareness explains why the modern secular State is always, for reactionaries Christian and otherwise, a straw man for ready and familiar excoriation: 'So long ... as we consider finance, industry, trade, and agriculture merely as competing interests to be reconciled from time to time ... so long as we consider "education" as a good in itself of which everyone has a right to the utmost, without any ideal of the good life for society

⁴⁵ For its part, the State had been registering the Church's modern demise for some considerable time. For example, in 1904 Lord Hugh Cecil could tell the House of Commons 'On all sides there are signs of the decay of the faith. People do not go to church, or, if they go, it is for the sake of the music, or for some non-religious motive. The evidence is overwhelming that the doctrines of Christianity have passed into the region of doubt' (speech, March 14).

or for the individual, we shall move from one uneasy compromise to another' (p.63). This protest is once more a beration of modernity's cardinal inversion of the spiritual/temporal antinomy, whereby the 'good life' for humanity has become centered on the primary gratification of its material desires, furnished, for better or ill, through finance, industry, trade, and the rest. Moreover, it repudiates any Enlightenment legacy which believes in human enhancement through universal edification ahead of spiritual ministration.

A tone of spiteful defeatism colours the conclusion of *The Idea of a Christian Society*, and all of modernity's socially reforming accomplishments are passed off as 'the quick and simple organisation of society for ends which, being only material and worldly, must be as ephemeral as worldly success'. And Eliot is grasping at straws while revealing a fundamental misunderstanding of *modern* political philosophy when he describes it as deriving its sanction from ethics, and ethics, in its turn, from the truth of religion; claiming further that 'it is only by returning to the eternal source of truth that we can hope for any social organisation which will not, to its ultimate destruction, ignore some essential aspect of reality' (p.63). Since Machiavelli, the most compelling strain of sceptical modern political philosophy has derived its sanction not from ethics but from exigency, and the exploitation, where advantageous, of the religious status quo. (As Nietzsche woundingly put it in *Human, All Too Human*: 'our present morality has grown up in the soil of the *ruling* tribes and castes'.) But Eliot's polemics draw him down a contradictory path when he berates democracy for lacking fundamental principles and for not containing 'enough positive content to stand *alone* against the [totalitarian] forces that you dislike - it can easily be transformed by them' (p.63 - my emphasis). What can it amount to other than fundamentalist intimidation to be told that 'If you will not have God (and He is a jealous God) you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin'? Could he have meant this in terms as crude as they seem, a Hobsonian choice between competing authoritarianisms: the vengeful, Old Testament Hebrew God and modern political ogres like Hitler or Stalin so as to drive contumacious modernity back to the Church through fear, if nothing else? And having on numerous occasions, in this text and elsewhere, hinted at totalitarianism as an ally of sorts for Christianity, he seems to be here at the very last grudgingly changing sides to present Christianity and a rectified democracy as the only sort of righteous alliance able to hold back the looming tide of fascism and communism.

The prompt for this totalitarian disavowal appears to have been, as it was for almost all Conservatives of the time, the supineness of the British government in the late 1930s towards the emergent European dictatorships, culminating in the Munich Crisis and the acquiescence of Britain and France in Hitler's annexation of Czechoslovakia. Even the Orthodox Christian, biblically entreated to eschew violence

and turn the other cheek, can bemoan political ignominy: 'the events of September, 1938 ... brought a profounder realisation of a general plight ... The feeling which was new and unexpected was a feeling of humiliation, which seemed to demand an act of personal contrition, of humility, repentance and amendment ... a doubt of the validity of civilisation'.⁴⁶ The cause of that degradation continues to be laid at the feet of spurious modern civilisation, in which liberal democracy and mercantilist economics have fatally adulterated the breed. Perhaps unconsciously affirming Yeats's 1920 democratic prognosis that 'The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity', Eliot observes

We could not match conviction with conviction, we had no ideas with which we could either meet or oppose the ideas opposed to us. Was our society, which had always been so assured of its superiority and rectitude, so confident of its unexamined premisses, assembled round anything more permanent than a congeries of banks, insurance companies and industries, and had it any beliefs more essential than a belief in compound interest and the maintenance of dividends? (p.64).

In a post declaration-of-hostilities rider dated September 6th 1939, Eliot related that 'The whole of this book, with Preface and Notes, was completed before it was known that we should be at war. But the possibility of war, which has now been realised, was always present to my mind' (p.64). If that were true, then his distinctions between Christian and 'pagan' forms of society aside, one might reasonably have expected such augury to be manifested in a far more resolute attitude towards European despotism. Surely this textual reality would suggest that he was beguiled by totalitarianism, seeing it as a particularly useful social depurative, and consequently remained oblivious to its imperialistic tendencies and the possibility of war with it until he and his entire generation were overtaken by events? But in this devolution from initial enamoration with modern romantic authoritarianism to subsequent disenchantment we must allow

⁴⁶ Interestingly, Eliot does expand on 'the attitude of a Christian Society towards Pacifism' in an endnote to page 24, saying *inter alia* 'I cannot but believe that the man who maintains that war is in all circumstances wrong, is in some way repudiating an obligation towards society; and in so far as the society is a Christian society the obligation is so much the more serious ... the idea of a Christian society seems incompatible with the idea of absolute pacifism'. This militancy has its origins in a sort of Old Testament 'sins of the fathers' fundamentalism bound up with the conservative's by-now-familiar outlook on flawed human nature and Original Sin, so that conflict is a perennial condemnation, binding on us all: 'The notion of communal responsibility, of the responsibility of every individual for the sins of the society to which he belongs, is one that needs to be more firmly apprehended; and if I share the guilt of my society in time of "peace", I do not see how I can absolve myself from it in time of war, by abstaining from the common action'.

that he was far from alone.

The last full third of *The Idea of a Christian Society* is taken up with 'Notes' and an Appendix. Because these parts cogently rehearse and often elucidate what has gone before, they warrant as careful consideration as the main text. However, only those endnotes which have not been more usefully dealt with in their foregoing context will be treated here.

Concluding his endnote to page 58 of the main text, Eliot reproduces an extract from p.207 of the book *Peace and Pacifism* by Humphrey Beever. Beever writes, 'a religion which speaks of redemption by the incarnate Son of God ... which makes the perpetual representation of His atoning Sacrifice its essential act of worship must be the declared enemy of all who see in the state the be-all and end-all of man's life'. Patent though Beever's statement may be, the fact that this extract has been chosen and offered without gloss indicates Eliot's imprimatur.

Marshalling another doctrinal ally, in an endnote to page 64 Eliot reproduces verbatim a letter printed in *The Times* of October 5, 1938, from a correspondent personally known to him from their activities in the Moot, J.H. Oldham, 'which might serve as prologue or epilogue to all that I have said'. Since this same letter provided nothing less than 'the immediate stimulus for the lectures which form this book', it becomes the apocalyptic prism through which Eliot's enterprise can be comprehended. Oldham refers *inter alia* to

the unforgettable experiences [of the non-specified Munich Crisis] through which we have lived during the past few days ... The period of grace that has been given us may be no more than a postponement of the day of reckoning *unless we make up our minds to seek a radical cure*. Our civilisation can recover only if we are determined to root out the cancerous growths which have brought it to the verge of complete collapse (p.85 - my emphasis).

Despite, or perhaps because of, the 'unforgettable experiences' of an intimidated Anglo-French backdown in the face of Nazi imperialism, Oldham is yet one more subscriber to the collective *mea culpa* school of democratic animadversion: 'To focus our attention on evil in others is a way of escape from the painful struggle of eradicating it from our own hearts and lives and an evasion of our real responsibilities. The basal truth is that the spiritual foundations of Western civilisation have been undermined'. Notwithstanding that after the annexations of Abyssinia, the Rhineland, Austria, and, of course, post-Munich, no one could remain gulled over the imperialistic complexion of continental fascism, Oldham, sounding much like Eliot, can find reactionary grounds on which to expound, if not condone it, so that 'The systems which are in the ascendant on the continent may be regarded from one point of view as convulsive attempts to arrest the progress of [liberal democratic] disintegration'. Oldham, like Eliot, carpingly

asks 'What clear alternative have we in this country? The mind of England is confused and uncertain' (pp.85-86). Social, moral, and religious restoration are the ends, and purgation is the means, so unless the medicine is to be of the fascist variety, that 'clear alternative' can, as Oldham and Eliot gauge matters, only be found in the form of an austere Christian reinvestiture. Oldham asks 'May our salvation lie in an attempt to recover our Christian heritage, not in the sense of going back to the past but in discovering in the central affirmations and insights of the Christian faith new spiritual energies to regenerate and revitalise our sick society? ... [is not] [T]he path of wisdom ... rather to attempt to work out a Christian doctrine of modern society *and to order our national life in accordance with it?* ... [N]othing short of a really heroic effort will avail to save mankind from its present evils and the destruction which must follow in their train' (pp.86-87 - my emphasis).⁴⁷

This all-important (and paradoxically modern in its self-mandating) matter of 'order[ing] our national life' in accordance with Christian doctrine is taken up in the Appendix which concludes the book. Here Eliot restates and endorses a tradition of secular intervention on the part of the Orthodox Church; once more, in a contemporary milieu it is 'the Church's business to interfere with the World' '[and, he goes on] 'It is assumed that if the State leaves the Church alone ... then the Church has no right to interfere with the organisation of society, or with the conduct of *those who deny its beliefs*. It is assumed that any such interference would be the oppression of the majority by a minority. Christians must take *a very different view* of their duty' (pp. 91-92, my emphases). Two observations can be made here: firstly, since Eliot has earlier insisted that the Church should abjure the straightforward role of moral lodestar, its paramount 'duty' can only be the inculcation of doctrinalism; secondly, since even in the 1930s practicing Christians were in a rapidly declining minority, force-fed social interposition on their part could not but amount to theocratic oppression. But as he affirms, the

⁴⁷ Besides twentyone pages of supplemental Notes and an Appendix, Eliot offers a postscript quoting 'a distinguished theologian' who proofread his text. In the words of this Divine, 'A main part of the problem ... is the defective realisation among us that Christianity is primarily a Gospel-message, a dogma, a belief about God and the world and man, which demands of man a response of faith and repentance ... a sense of the proportion of things and a spirit of discipline, which are direct fruits of the life of faith'. This credo, rather than infusing belief, points up the anachronisms residing in an Orthodox Christianity engulfed by late-modernism: if the Word of God is downgraded by its own proclaimers from the imperative of absolute truth to mere dogmatism in order to put its adherents to the trial of faith, it risks competition with doctrines and ideologies which may be altogether more compelling. And attitudes like 'repentance', 'a sense of the proportion of things', and 'a spirit of discipline' (at least as they are conjured here) are manifestly obsolete in a terminally secular age.

Church does not exist `primarily for the propagation of Christian morality: ... the Church exists for the glory of God and the sanctification of souls ... To accept two ways of life in the same society, one for the Christian and another for the rest would be for the Church to abandon its task of evangelising the world ... It therefore must struggle for a condition of society which will give the maximum of opportunity for us [the faithful] to lead wholly Christian lives, and the maximum of opportunity for others [the unconverted] to become Christians' (pp. 92-93). So much for the `why' of secular engagement: the end is to praise God and win souls to Christ, precisely as a modern political ideology seeks to win followers; as to the `how', Eliot is less specific, though in a survey of the contemporary scene for a political system amenable to a compact with Christianity, totalitarianism, as we have been repeatedly assured, offers no less promise than does democracy:

Both Fascism and Communism have fundamental ideas which are incompatible with Christianity. But in practice, a Fascist or a Communist state might realise its idea more or less, and it might be more or less tolerable ... Instead of merely condemning Fascism and Communism, therefore, we might do well to consider that we also live in a mass-civilisation following many wrong ambitions and wrong desires, and that if our society renounces completely its obedience to God, it will become no better, and possibly worse, than some of those abroad which are popularly execrated (p.94).⁴⁸

The Eliotic Church will therefore `interfere' in the world closer to home by `a more profound scrutiny of our society; unlike the charter of the secular reformer, that social scrutiny will limit itself to the question: to what depth is the foundation of our society not merely neutral but positively anti-Christian?' Unlike the secular reformer, it is not enough for Eliot `simply to see the evil and injustice and suffering of this world, and precipitate oneself into action. We must know, [he says] what only theology can tell us, why these things are wrong'. And the test of wrongfulness turns, we discover, entirely upon whether the presence of social malignities distracts us from the priority of attending to our salvation: `If this is a world in which I, and the majority of my fellow-beings, live in that perpetual distraction from God which exposes us to the one true peril, that of final and complete alienation from God after death, there is some wrong that I must try to help put right'. And while we have no clues as to just what such a capital iniquity might be, other than the probability of its derivation in some familiar flaw residing in the `fallen' nature of our shared humanity, he reminds us that `If there is any profound immorality to which we are all committed as a condition of living in

⁴⁸ To save repeated annotation, note that Eliot observes the American English convention of spelling noun and verb alike as `practice'.

society at all, then that is a matter of the greatest concern to the Church' (p.96).

Eliot's difficulty, like that of the Christian Church itself, lies with the issue of self-definition as to role and function in the late-modern age. Is it primarily as recruiting-agent for the salvation of souls, keeper of the seal of Orthodox faith, or as social critic and driver of real change in practical secular affairs? This difficulty explains why he declines to traffic in specifics because, being 'neither a sociologist nor an economist ... it would be inappropriate, in this context, to produce any formula for setting the world right'. However, if he cleaves to the former and insists as he does that 'It is much more the business of the Church to say what is wrong, that is, what is inconsistent with [purely] Christian doctrine, than to propose particular schemes of improvement' (pp.96-97), then he is consigning such slender social proclamations to irrelevancy twice over. And if the role of the modern Church is not to encourage goodness in the world or use its agencies to seek practical redress for evil, but to pontify over 'what is everywhere and always *wrong*', then it will have all the modern-day appeal of its doleful Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah.

Showing his obligations to Pound and Major Douglas, Eliot cannot finish his Appendix - a sort of authorial afterword - without one last swipe at some by now familiar economic evils:

Perhaps the dominant vice of our time, from the point of view of the Church, will be proved to be Avarice. Surely there is something wrong in our attitude towards money.... The fact that money is always forthcoming for the purpose of making more money, whilst it is so difficult to obtain for purposes of exchange, and for the needs of the most needy, is disturbing to those who are not economists.... And I believe that modern war is chiefly caused by some immorality of [capitalist] competition which is always with us in times of 'peace' (pp.97-98).

Firmly doctrinal to the last, however, Eliot concludes by returning to his theme of moral self-awareness where the priority of the moment is

the diffusion of knowledge of what is wrong - *morally* wrong - and of *why* it is wrong. We are all dissatisfied with the way in which the world is conducted: some believe that it is a misconduct in which we all have complicity ... And here is the perpetual message of the Church: to affirm, to teach and to apply, true theology. We cannot be satisfied to be Christians at our devotions and merely secular reformers all the rest of the week ... The Church has perpetually to answer this question: to what purpose were we born? What is the end of Man? (pp.98-99 - original emphases)

Responding to such timeless metaphysical posers as these last two, we may venture to reply that the Church is merely one group of questioners, with one set of answers, while

allowing that these enquiries nevertheless constitute the apt province of a religion. But Christianity, claiming to be veridical and therefore changeless, is in reality only the secondary subject of this text; modern society is its primary focus (the use of 'Christian' in its title is, after all, as an adjectival qualifier). This chapter has set out to unfold *The Idea of a Christian Society* as giving temporal *carte blanche* to the newly politicized, Orthodox modern Churchman and woman. So what does matter to that end is the second-to-last sentence extracted above, where Eliot, despite his preliminary assurances away back on the second page about his concern with contemporary society being idealistic, rather than politically practical, can by the close be hinting at a dubiously open-ended social warrant conferred on the contemporary Christian; one who is not even to be placated with 'mere' secular reform six days out of the seven. At the end of this disquieting little text the same questions still linger: 'just what *kind and degree* of reform, ecclesiastical and socio-political, does this emerging new breed of militant, late 1930s Christian really seek?'⁴⁹

⁴⁹ For a postwar (and more moderate) Christian's answer see D.L. Munby: *The Idea of a Secular Society and its Significance for Christians*, (The Riddell Memorial Lectures delivered at King's College in the University of Durham, March 1962 and published by Oxford University Press, 1963). Responding to both Eliot's 1939 text and Coleridge's original *On the Constitution of the Church and State, according to the Idea of Each*, Munby writes 'We might be more welcoming today to secularism; there is no great gulf between men who share a sensitive respect for human values; in any case we have to work together in society' p.89).

CHAPTER 3

NOTES TOWARDS THE DEFINITION OF CULTURE (1948)

(i)

Art is not a mirror to society, but a hammer

(John Grierson, 1898-1972, Scottish-born Modernist short film maker - the 'father of British documentary', later director of mass communications for UNESCO - here paraphrasing Nietzsche).

(ii)

Art is a weapon in the class struggle
(Motto of the John Reed Club [c.1921]).

In his Preface to the 1962 edition of *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, Eliot dates this monograph as having begun to take shape 'towards the end of the Second World War'. He records his agreeable surprise on re-reading it for the first time after some years and finding 'I had nothing to retract, and nothing upon which I was disposed to enlarge', a statement which seems at odds with his next-paragraph resolution to one day 'submit [his] social criticism to the same examination' as the recent review of his forty years of literary criticism, 'account[ing] for developments and changes of opinion', particularly since 'as a man matures, and acquires greater experience of the world, the years may be expected to bring about even greater changes in his views on social and political matters than in his tastes and opinions in the field of literature'. Despite all this, and the book's inclusion in the publisher's Eliotic *œuvre* under the category of 'social criticism', its author *tout de suite* introduces his purpose as being not one of 'outlin[ing] a social or political philosophy'; rather, it is to 'help define a word, the word culture'.

Having put us off our guard in this way, Eliot, the inveterate social and political assayer, goes straight about his work. We are to note that 'the first important assertion is

that no culture has appeared or developed except together with a religion ... culture will appear to be the product of the religion, or the religion the product of the culture' (p.15). This is hardly contestible when applied to Western cultural history up to the onset of the modern era, but becomes a claim with far less substance in the period since. The growth of, and promulgation of the kind of culture Eliot has in mind necessitates three preconditions: 'the first of these is organic [social] ... structure, such as will foster hereditary transmission of culture ... and this requires the persistence of [the established] social classes'. Next, 'a culture should be analysable, geographically, into local cultures'; lastly, there should be a 'balance of unity and diversity in religion - that is, universality of doctrine' (p.15). So the slim volume which guilefully began with no intention of outlining a social or political philosophy has already parenthetically encoded three Conservative doctrines: the retention of the hereditary class system, the return to regionalism as an antidote to modern urbanisation, and inevitably, the centrality of religious Orthodoxy, since 'you are unlikely to have a high civilisation where these conditions are absent'. The conflation of social class and traditional Christianity leads us to reflect on just whose, and what kind of culture we are here encountering. The word 'high' just quoted, and his hectoring stock-Modernist dismissal of philistinism reveal the answers:

What I try to say is this: here are what I believe to be essential conditions for the growth and for the survival of culture. If they conflict with any passionate faith of the reader - if, for instance, he finds it shocking that culture and equalitarianism should conflict, if it seems monstrous to him that anyone should have 'advantages of birth' - I do not ask him to change his faith, I merely ask him to stop paying lip-service to culture (p.16).

When Eliot says 'to rescue this word [culture] is the extreme of my ambition' what he really intends is the reappropriation of both word and concept so as to achieve for them synonymity, not with an egalitarian culture in all its manifest and popularised expressions, but with 'high' art and an intellectual and social class perceived as the traditional custodians and consumers of it. In this monopolistic way, both elevated culture and class become mutually sustaining and jointly exclusive.⁵⁰

Because they so prefigure Conservative core-values, 'culture' and 'civilisation' are always the first elements to be detrimentally assayed in any obscurantist traducement of contemporary life. Eliot claims that while 'a new civilisation is, in fact, coming into

⁵⁰ While I have opted to omit literary theory from this thesis, the contemporary sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of 'cultural capital' requires mention. According to Bourdieu, the making of cultural distinctions secures and legitimates forms of power and control that derive from economic inequality; that is, the social class in power controls the form that culture takes in order to maintain its position.

being all the time ... the civilisation of the present day would seem very new indeed to any civilised man of the eighteenth century, and I cannot imagine the most ardent or radical reformer of that age taking much pleasure in the civilisation that would meet his eye now' (p.18). As between 'higher and lower cultures', so he would have it, occur 'advance and retrogression' in phases of human cultural as well as social life: 'we can assert with some confidence that our own period is one of decline; that the standards of culture are lower than they were fifty years ago; and that the evidences of this decline are visible in every department of human activity' (p.19). The book's Introduction is rounded off with another recitation of the crabbed Othodox view of flawed human nature, irredeemably tainted with Original Sin; so burdened are we with 'intellectual errors and ... emotional prejudices ... [W]e should look for the improvement of society, as we seek our own individual improvement, in relatively minute particulars' (p.20).

In Chapter 1, entitled 'The Three Senses of "Culture"', Eliot's stress is on the cultural embellishment, not merely of individuals or even of a group or class, but consistent with his collectivism, of the whole of society. For him, Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* fails on this score due to its schematic 'absence of social background'. If Arnold's notion of culture spurring the individual, as Eliot puts it, to 'rise superior to the limitations of any class, rather than to realise its [their particular class's] highest attainable ideals' is an illusion, then it follows that culture is differentially stepped and stratified like the traditionally hierarchical social system; thus, 'we are driven in the end to find it [culture] in the pattern of the society as a whole' (pp.22-23).⁵¹ So Eliot goes on purportedly discussing culture, while in reality engaging with social theory. As he writes:

the culture of the individual cannot be isolated from that of the group, and ... the culture of the group cannot be abstracted from that of the whole society; and ... our notion of 'perfection' must take all three senses of 'culture' into account at once.... [I]t is only by an overlapping and sharing of interests, by participation and mutual appreciation, that the cohesion necessary for culture can obtain (p.24).

⁵¹ Eliot's objection to Arnold's misapplication of culture here conforms with his later opposition to universal education found in Chapter VI, entitled 'Notes on Education and Culture: and Conclusion'. While he goes on to make limited concessions for a meritocracy in thrall to the higher social classes he consistently fears any avocation which can be turned by modern individuals of ability into a 'social catalyst' to erode the ramparts of a traditionally hierarchical social system. Misgivings over widespread education aside, if he were indeed the modern champion of culture then any Arnoldian-type opportunities for 'social laddering' opened up by culture would not seem repugnant. The fact that they do affirms that Eliot the political ideologue has primacy over Eliot the artist; instancing his lifelong opposition to comprehensive education provides the blunt, reactionary essence of that ideology.

'Perfect' culture will therefore only occur as by-product of the perfect, cohering, necessarily *hierarchical* society. Thus he writes 'As a society develops towards functional complexity and differentiation ... It will not, I think, be disputed that ... as in every civilised society of the past, there must be these different [social and cultural] levels' (p.25). Eliot's claim 'I do not think that the most ardent champions of social equality dispute this' rests on the Modernist aesthete's inflated estimation of cultural utility - the chimerical belief that social classes or groups will be placated so long as they are culturally, rather than materially recognised, by finding the means of ostensible class solidarity in aesthetic or folkloric blandishments.⁵² And note how 'civilisation' has been noiselessly intruded so as to complete a sort of ideal triumvirate of social organisation: optimal class hierarchization generates culture generates 'every civilised society of the past' - that familiar 'past Golden Age' of Conservative dogma. Improbably, he seems to be suggesting that the reversion to such a putative, historical model will ward off the aesthetic disintegration which attends upon modern cultural specialisation ('the most radical disintegration that a society can suffer', no less). This sundering has already become conspicuous in Western society with its 'readily apprehended social ailments' with the result that

Religious thought and practice, philosophy and art, all tend to become isolated areas cultivated by groups in no communication with each other. The artistic sensibility is impoverished by its divorce from the religious sensibility, the religious by its separation from the artistic; and the vestige of *manners* may be left to the few survivors of a vanishing class who, their sensibility untrained by either religion or art and their minds unfurnished by the material for witty conversation, will have no context in their lives to give value to their behaviour. And deterioration on the higher levels is a matter of concern ... to the whole people (p.26 - original emphasis).⁵³

⁵² This sentence ends with the seemingly impartial observation that 'difference of opinion turns on whether the transmission of group culture must be by inheritance - whether each cultural level must propagate itself - or whether it can be hoped that some mechanism of selection will be found, so that every individual shall in due course take his place at the highest cultural level for which his natural aptitudes qualify him'. But his 'hope' for the second option is only propitiative; certainly he preferred that both things might happen together, but in case there should be in any doubt as to the prerogative of the first system of cultural transmission, we are told on p.48 that in their representing the variety of culture that really matters (that is, the 'more conscious' kind, displaying 'greater specialization'), the 'aristocracy' alone 'have a peculiar and essential function' to perform in its preservation.

⁵³ What Cairns Craig has to say in his *Yeats, Eliot, Pound and the Politics of Poetry* is apposite here: 'The thread that ties the modernists together in their poetic is ... the concept of a poem that "borrows its

As Yeats's cloistered Anglo-Irish Ascendancy class had long since discovered, 'concern' for a decline in the witty intellection and gentle manners of those 'on the higher levels' is an unlikely straw in the wind of modern social evolution.

Does religion hold more promise for what to Eliot is nothing less than 'that which makes life worth living' - culture? Drawing on the historical example of the infiltration of classical Graeco-Roman culture by Christianity, Eliot ponders 'whether any culture could come into being, or maintain itself, without a religious basis' and promptly provides his own answer with the assertion that 'culture [is] ... essentially, the incarnation (so to speak) of the religion of a people' (p.28). This he distils even more strikingly with the claim that 'culture and religion ... when each term is taken in the right context, [are] different aspects of the same thing' (p.29). So interactive are they that the one cannot be 'preserved, extended and developed' without concerning itself with the maintenance of the other, from whence it follows that 'there is an aspect in which we can see a religion as the *whole way of life* of a people, from birth to the grave, from morning to night and even in sleep, and that way of life is also its culture' (p.31 - original emphasis). But the collective pronoun here used and that notional 'whole way of life' are not the glad previsions of the religious annunciator, because even beneficent Christian tidings are expropriated by a pious elitism. Just as the gradations of society and culture are ordered along lines of class, so 'we must recognise that when this identification [of religion and culture] is complete, it means in actual societies both an inferior culture and an inferior religion' because the process of 'identification' exposes them to the danger of sully[ing] by extraneous and inferior strains of the other (p.31). This is why the Christian faithful must stand aloof and 'consider the quality of the integration required for the full cultivation of the spiritual life, ... keep[ing] in mind the possibility of grace and the exemplars of sanctity in order not to sink into despair. And when we consider the problem of evangelisation, of the development of a Christian society, we have reason to quail' (p.32). But in the matter of bearing witness to his faith, where is the real Eliot? Is he sincerely greeting the evangelisation of the Christian Gospel, or is even his religion held captive to the reactionary's anti-democratic, anti-fraternal stamp?

It seems that Eliot has fallen into a trap of his own making: by yoking 'high' culture to religion he has won back 'civilisation' from secular frivolousness.⁵⁴ But in acting as

beauty" [Yeats] from the memories our minds have stored, or that have been stored in the transpersonal memory of the tradition' (p.64). For this reason, he goes on to say, 'Yeats, Eliot and Pound were driven to politics in order to maintain the institutions and the patterns of society which preserved and promulgated the kinds of memory on which their poetry relied' (p.71).

⁵⁴ As per the (peculiarly quaint, English) list he offers on p.31: 'Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the

cultural sentinel, he finds himself committed to an equivalent Christian solicitousness, and with it a distinctly un-Christian lack of charity. It would seem that general Modernist animus given expression (in the case of Eliot and the long list of fellow converts to Orthodoxy) in an elect possessiveness towards the remnants of Western culture and religion is justified in view of the supreme theological, and thence political stakes involved, for 'It is only when we imagine our culture as it ought to be, if our society were a really Christian society, that we can dare to speak of Christian culture as the highest culture; it is only by referring to all the phases of this culture, which has been the culture of Europe, that we can affirm that it is the highest culture that the world has ever known'. Contemporary European society has become so corroded with secularism, liberalism, democracy, and all the other humanist afflictions of modernity that 'In comparing our culture as it is today, with that of non-Christian peoples, we must be prepared to find that ours is in one respect or another inferior' (pp.33-34). Thus, if fallen contemporary society were somehow to revert to its traditional Christian disposition, Western culture would be rehabilitated and once more pre-eminent and society concomitantly restored to irenic, hierarchical 'health' because 'religion ... gives an apparent meaning to life, provides the frame-work for a culture, and protects the mass of humanity from boredom and despair' (p.34).

Chapter II, entitled 'The Class and the Elite', finds Eliot indulging in sociological speculation to justify two familiar Conservative tenets: the importance of the retention of social class, and the development of a culture fitted for the higher levels thereof. Thus, 'differentiation of [social] function ... promotes the development of *classes* ... the

twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar'. The derision towards popularism and the chattering and middle classes involved in the compiling of this list is obvious. Further on, the leisured reader of his type complains 'We are encumbered not only with too many new books: we are further embarrassed by too many periodicals, reports and privately circulated memoranda. In the endeavour to keep up with the most intelligent of these publications we may sacrifice the three permanent reasons for reading: the acquisition of wisdom, the enjoyment of art, and the pleasure of entertainment' (p.86). And Eliot was always contemptuous of that most modern of popular entertainments, the cinema: 'Even the humblest material artefact, which is the product and the symbol of a particular civilisation, is an emissary of the culture out of which it comes: to particularise only by mentioning that influential and inflammable article the celluloid film' (p.92). In his editorial to *The Criterion* for October 1927, he broods over 'what happens to the minds of the thousands of people who feast their eyes every night, when in a particularly passive state under the hypnotic influence of continuous music, upon films the great majority of which have been confected in studios of the Hollywood type' (p.290).

class itself possesses a function, that of maintaining that part of the total culture of the society which pertains to that class ... this maintenance of a particular level of culture is to the benefit, not merely of the class which maintains it, but of the society as a whole' (p.35 - original emphasis). In this way, the various social classes and their requisite levels of culture make up a static social mosaic. Importantly, this 'prevent[s] us from supposing that the culture of a "higher" class is something superfluous to society as a whole ... and from supposing that it is something which ought to be shared equally by all other classes' (p.35). The social consequence of all this is that the 'higher' classes, like their culture, are safely cocooned; they become remotely relevant and immovable, and thus the communal stasis so approved by the Conservative will be procured. Rather than there being any egalitarian 'duty incumbent upon us, to bring about a classless society.... [I]t is now the opinion of some of the most advanced minds that some qualitative differences between individuals must still be recognised, and that the superior individuals must be formed into suitable groups, endowed with appropriate powers, and perhaps with varied emoluments and honours. These groups, formed of individuals apt for powers of government and administration, will direct the public life of the nation; the individuals composing them will be spoken of as "leaders".... [A]nd these groups are what we call elites' (p.36). Such echelons of ability will engender 'superior individuals' who will form themselves into the specific interest groups Eliot delineates as mostly vocational elites, but which are in reality masquerading Platonic meritocracies 'settling into positions of authority'. Elitist of the cultural variety and literary luminary that Eliot himself is, he is lured by meritocracy, but his own acknowledgement that 'the elites of the future will differ in one important respect from any that we know: they will replace the classes of the past, whose positive functions they will assume' (p.36) poses difficulties for someone who twenty years earlier had flagrantly defined himself with the triumvirate of 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion'. Meritocracy, as the conservative Eliot well knows, can be fatal for systems of hereditary privilege and monarchy, and worse, can encourage social volatility by way of aptitudinal determinism on a worryingly individual level; in his words, the doctrine of elites 'implies a radical transformation of society ... It posits an *atomic* view of society' (p.37 - original emphasis).

But the worst consequences of the emergence of classless elites are for culture. As we have seen, culture, and now decorum likewise, are inherited on the basis of class; it is, after all, 'the function of the class as a whole to preserve and communicate standards of *manners* - which are a vital element in group culture'. Eliot's fear is that cultural and social estrangement will ensue because individuals comprising modern elites and the professional conclaves which emerge in consequence of their functions, whether they be political, bureaucratic, legal, intellectual, artistic, military, or even theological, will

have only their restricted sphere of expertise in common: 'the differences of background will be so great, that they will be ... separated by everything else ... They will be united only by a part, and that the most conscious part, of their personalities; they will meet like committees' (pp.42 & 47). So, fitting neatly between paradoxical modern tendencies of social homogeneity on one hand and technological divergence on the other, Eliot's anything-but-meritocratic class system finds its niche and its ally at a stroke: to overcome their 'differences of background' technocratic and superintendent elites must 'therefore be attached to *some* class, whether higher or lower: but ... [as he makes no pretence at denying] it is likely to be the dominant class that attracts this elite to itself' (p.42). As Eliot hopes, once meritocrats are bound by anything other than aptitude, their elite endowments become mitigated while the class which collusively annexes them [for 'dominant' above, read 'higher' class] has its traditional base of power enhanced, and so what began as meritocracy becomes transmuted over time into a revived aristocracy.

Predictably, Eliot lays cultural stress, along with all other inculcable values, on the family ('by far the most important channel of transmission of culture ... when family life fails to play its part, we must expect our culture to deteriorate' [p.43]). An outmoded emphasis on dynastic genealogy will do much to cement that all-important social continuity; thus when Eliot speaks of the family, he has in mind 'a bond which embraces a longer period of time' than the living generations, where 'What is held up for admiration is not devotion to a family, but personal affection between the members of it'. Rather than sentimental attachment to family life, he accentuates 'piety towards the dead, however obscure, and a solicitude for the unborn, however remote. Unless this reverence for past and future is cultivated in the home, it can never be more than a verbal convention in the community' (p.44).

Eliot, his ingrained Conservatism and enmity towards modernity aside, has a vested personal interest for asserting that classes and elites are not mutually exclusive because the American-born 'outsider', debarred on the score of birthright, has only his intellectual and cultural pretensions and the sodality of his Anglo-Catholicism wherewith to furnish the keys to the otherwise closed door of cliquish social class; this is why he wants to extol 'a vigorous society [where] there will be present both class and elite, with some overlapping and constant interaction between them'.⁵⁵ This

⁵⁵ The mid-west, St Louis-born Eliot remained conscious, as in his compatriot Pound's lines, of being '... born / In a half savage country, out of date; / Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn;' (*Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, 5-7). This sensitivity is confirmed in a letter dated July 1919 from Eliot to his English acquaintance Mary Hutchinson, setting out the impulses behind his writing of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'. Here the culturally marginalised and politically timorous Eliot confesses: 'remember

preoccupation with social class and his profound engagement with the native literary culture and religion of England can be deciphered as overcompensatory gestures on the marginalised Eliot's part. His demonstrating what amounts to a notional Conservatism, surpassing the locals in literary art and criticism, and participating in the State Church in its most traditional reification ought to have been enough to establish impeccable Anglophilic credentials and guarantee his inclusion in the rarefied strata of an otherwise impregnable British class system.

The absence of all categories of hereditary rights would be anathema for a Conservative, and so 'an elite ... so far as the natural impulse to pass on to one's offspring both power and privilege is not artificially checked, will tend to establish itself as a class'. A true doctrine of elites would mean the voluntary handover of power and prestige at regular generational intervals with adverse consequences for social and cultural succession. Eliot, vacillating yet again between culture and politics brought on by his distinguished participation in the first category and his native absorption with the second, foresees danger in a society where the functions of class are assumed by elites because 'we have very little evidence about the perpetuation of government by elite' (p.45). In citing the revolutionary examples of America and Soviet Russia, he would seem to be implying that elites tend to develop a radical character, and bloody revolutions are always ruinous for social and cultural continuity; in consequence, 'the elimination of [its] upper class ... can be a disaster for a country' (p.46). Eliot's 'case for a society with a class structure, the affirmation that it is, in some sense, the "natural" society' rests on an organic arrangement in which aristocracy 'should have a peculiar and essential function, as peculiar and essential as the function of any other part of society ... a structure of society in which there will be, from "top" to "bottom", a continuous gradation of cultural levels'.⁵⁶ But he draws a nice distinction in the course of pretending to refute that the upper strata of society possess more culture than the

that I am a *metic* - a foreigner, and that I *want* to understand you, and all the background and tradition of you. I shall try to be frank ... it is very difficult with me - both by inheritance and because of my very suspicious and cowardly disposition.... I may simply prove to be a savage' (*Letters* I, p.318 - original emphases).

⁵⁶ The transparency of Eliot's core political agenda is demonstrated on p.48 where he writes 'What I have advanced is not a "defence of aristocracy" - an emphasis upon the importance of one organ of society. Rather it is a plea on behalf of a form of society in which an aristocracy should have a peculiar and essential function, as peculiar and essential as the function of any other part of society'. When that 'function' amounts, on Eliot's own parameters, to nothing more than custodianship of its very own reflexive 'high' culture, what is this if it is not a (carelessly damning, as it happens) 'defence of aristocracy'?

lower - why they matter is that they superintend 'a more conscious culture and a greater specialisation of culture'. And since 'no true democracy can maintain itself unless it contains these different levels of culture', *ipso facto*, no true system of governance can maintain itself unless it contains these different levels of class. From thence it syllogistically follows as though sociologically mandated that 'levels of culture may also be seen as levels of power to the extent that a smaller group at a higher level will have equal power with a larger group at a lower level' (p.48). This is surely a grievous misuse of culture to justify a baldly anti-democratic political outcome. A model of culture sold like this into political materiality seems at odds with the archetype of cultural harmony and autonomy Eliot has spent the last two chapters expounding and as Marx foretold, was a sure and certain way of consigning his cultural preferences to late-modern extinction or irrelevance, along with any moribund social class colluding with it.

Eliot concludes Chapter II by abruptly jettisoning meritocracy and (against the egalitarian tenor of Clement Atlee's post-war British Labour government) raising the anti-democratic stakes with remarks that abjure all principles of universal suffrage: 'complete equality means universal irresponsibility; and in such a society as I envisage, each individual would inherit greater or less responsibility ... according to the position in society which he *inherited* - each class would have *somewhat different responsibilities*' (p.48, my emphases). Even by Eliot's curmudgeonly standards, to depart from equitable principles of participatory democracy and come out with the proposition that 'A democracy in which everybody had an equal responsibility in everything would be oppressive for the conscientious and licentious for the rest' is to put us on our guard against all plausible attempts at alternative arrangements, including what he charitably proposes as 'a graded society'; his choice of word 'graded' is here instantly recognisable for its synonymy with 'hierarchical'.

So Chapter II, which has seen off the anti-hereditary threat posed by modern restatements of meritocracy can be précised in Eliot's own words:

If we agree that the primary vehicle for the transmission of culture is the family, and if we agree that in a more highly civilised society there must be different levels of culture, then it follows that to ensure the transmission of the culture of these different levels there must be groups of families persisting, from generation to generation, each in the same way of life (p.48).

Just as Yeats and Pound had been unable to do, Eliot cannot see that since the 'transmission of culture' referred to here is a sterile, strictly linear exchange, then the certain fate of such culture, along with any social class which clings to it (those 'families persisting ... each in the same way of life'), is at best a degenerate one.

In Chapter III, entitled 'Unity and Diversity: The Region', Eliot abruptly modifies his stance on class somewhat by allowing that 'Neither a classless society, nor a society of strict and impenetrable social barriers is good ... the classes, while remaining distinct, should be able to mix freely; and they should all have a community of culture with each other which will give them something in common' (p.50). Likewise, he does allow a passing if contradictory concession to meritocracy when he suggests that 'each class should have constant additions and defections'.

The previous chapter was given over to the interaction of culture and class; here it is the development of culture by region. Little space needs to be dedicated to this chapter because the espousal of regionalism and localised diversity, while comprising another standard Conservative yearning, is merely quaint when applied to culture but antiquarian when applied to the social fabric of a late-modern age irretrievably made over by metropolitan urbanisation, rapid transportation, mass-media saturation, and the economic and social fall-out of two global conflagrations. Loyalty in all its expressions - loyalty to locality of birth, to the family, to class, to the Head of State, and to the nation itself - forms part of Conservative dogma, as of course it does for Eliot: 'it would appear to be for the best that the great majority of human beings should go on living in the place in which they were born. Family, class and local loyalty all support each other; and if one of these decays, the others will suffer also' (p.52). However grudgingly modern Eliot may seem in allowing the inseparability of politics, economics, and culture, even acknowledging the need to 'grow a contemporary culture from the old roots', traditional notions of regionalism should not, in his opinion, be abandoned: 'The *absolute* value is that each area should have its characteristic culture, which should also harmonise with, and enrich, the cultures of the neighbouring areas. In order to realise this value it is necessary to investigate political or economic alternatives to centralisation in London or elsewhere' (pp.53-54). Nostalgia for regional differences of culture and even dialect forms an eccentric part of that 'Golden Age' myth so often revived for use as a sort of cudgel for anti-modern defamation.⁵⁷ Here Eliot would have Yeats on his side in suggesting that 'complete uniformity of culture throughout these islands would bring about a lower grade of culture altogether'; this is an inordinately straitened and alarmist prediction of modern cultural outcomes and is yet one more instance of his aesthetics playing second fiddle to his politics. Again, the artist *qua* artist ought to have been espousing the credo that cultural traits are the human

⁵⁷ Language is naturally all-important: 'for the transmission of a culture ... and for its maintenance, there is no safeguard more reliable than a language. And to survive for this purpose it must continue to be a literary language ... certainly a poetic one: otherwise the spread of [modern, secular] education will extinguish it' (p.57).

characteristics most resistant to 'uniformity' and adulteration. And this cultural masquerade is maintained. As Eliot suggested in Chapter II, true culture would not survive a classless political system. He now suggests the combined factors of class and region, 'by dividing the inhabitants of a country into two different kinds of groups, lead to a conflict favourable to creativeness and progress' (p.59). This unlikely estimation of conflict, where 'within limits ... friction, not only between individuals but between groups, seems ... necessary for civilisation', is not quite the contradiction it seems with what he had maintained, eight pages before, 'that if we cannot have periods of real peace, it is futile to hope for culture at all'. Eliot, accepting conflict as inevitable in fallen, naturalistic humankind, seems to imagine that the cataclysms waiting to be unleashed by egalitarianism, pent-up ideologies, mass politicisation, and rampant nationalism can be averted by social and cultural window-dressing, that is, by sustaining, rather than eliminating minor differences in regional and international mores, and of all things, class affiliations: 'Numerous cross-divisions favour peace within a nation, by dispersing and confusing animosities; they favour peace between nations, by giving every man enough antagonism at home to exercise all his aggressiveness' (p.60). And against the bald evidence of the previous thirty year Eastern European historical record, and earlier celebrated examples, he flatly claims 'A nation which has gradations of class seems to me, other things being equal, likely to be more tolerant and pacific than one which is not so organised' (p.60). So his manoeuvre is to welcome just enough low level regional and class antagonism and international rivalry as will hypothetically deflate larger scale discord - the classic strategy of distraction and deferral explained by the French cliché *plus ça change, plus ça reste la même chose*.

For this reason Eliot opposes the climate of post-war United Nations internationalism and derogates those 'zealots of world-government ... [who] assume, unconsciously, that their unity of organisation has an absolute value ... If these zealots are of the humanitarian type, they will assume that this process will take place naturally and painlessly' (p.61). He disavows fraternalism in part because of its Enlightenment overtones, but more so because such 'world-planners', however 'serious and humane ... [are] as grave a menace to culture as those who practice more violent methods. For [he goes on] it must follow from what I have already said about the value of local cultures, that a world culture which was simply a *uniform* culture would be no culture at all. We would have a humanity de-humanised. It would be a nightmare' (p.62 - original emphasis). Eliot's cultural divisiveness unmasks a cultural (and thence more general) xenophobia, which is a reliable indicator that partition of this kind has its genesis in identity politics. So while the cosmopolitan man of letters is obliged to pay lip-service to cultural universality ('We are therefore pressed to maintain the ideal of a world

culture, while admitting that it is something we [he] cannot *imagine*' [original emphasis]), his fear is that all of what makes him generally European and Christian, specifically English-American and Anglo-Catholic, innately artistic and socially select, will be blurred by any impulse towards cultural and economic globalisation. Naturally Eliot, self-appointed defender of culture and catholicism alike, wants to see art and religion installed as twin bulwarks underpinning the regionally and nationally heterogeneous, hierarchical version of new world-order he envisages; they are thus non-negotiable stumbling blocks to any world cultural archetype: 'Ultimately, antagonistic religions must mean antagonistic cultures; and ultimately, religions cannot be reconciled' (p.62). Little could he have known that beginning in the decade about to follow, the post-war world *was* to be 'culturally' restructured, but in the name of the pluralistically postmodern and by the dynamic of a globally binding consumerism - what the Marxist critic Frederic Jameson would later pointedly call the 'cultural logic of late capitalism'.

In Chapter IV entitled 'Unity and Diversity: Sect and Cult', Eliot's concern is with 'the cultural significance of religious divisions', but his argument turns on a self-admitted paradox: in what he calls 'developed societies' (like those of the Christian West) with their higher state of religious self-consciousness, we find that 'A higher religion imposes a conflict, a division, torment and struggle within the individual; a conflict sometimes between the laity and the priesthood; a conflict eventually between Church and State' (pp.67-68). Yet, in his first chapter he was at pains to emphasize how 'there is always, even in the most conscious and highly developed societies ... an aspect of identity between the religion and the culture'. So as to forestall any abashment now he candidly admits 'I am obliged to maintain two contradictory positions: that religion and culture are aspects of one unity, and that they are two different and contrasted things' (p.68). The advantage of this kind of dialectical duplexity for an interchangeable cultural theorist and religious proselytiser like Eliot is that he can amplify and abridge the definition and scope of culture at will so as to gratuitously snipe at secular society and then invoke formalist cultural and religious sanctuary whenever the going gets hot.

In order to compound the subterfuge, Eliot tells us that he attempts 'to contemplate [his] problems from the point of view of the sociologist, and not from that of the Christian apologist'. But while most of his generalisations are 'intended to have some applicability to all religion', his purview is more specifically homegrown: he is 'particularly concerned with Christian culture, with the Western World, with Europe, and with England', in other words, with inscribing cultural and religious identity, for Eurocentrics like himself, from the inside out (pp.68-69). Eliot's line of argument proceeds from the hardly original or contestable claim that 'the formation of a religion is also the formation of a culture' to, consistent with the thesis of his previous chapter,

the development of identity forged through unlikeness and idiosyncrasy of class, region, and nation. Thus, it follows that 'In certain historical conditions, a fierce exclusiveness may be a necessary condition for the preservation of a culture', and *ipso facto*, a religion.⁵⁸ This explains why

The life of Protestantism depends upon the survival of that against which it protests; and just as the culture of Protestant dissent would perish of inanition without the persistence of Anglican culture, so the maintenance of English culture is contingent upon the health of the culture of Latin Europe, and upon continuing to draw sustenance from that Latin culture (p.75).

Even in the matter of a commonly-shared Christian creed, it seems, fortification in a personal faith is still not enough; that adversarial, identity-sustaining dynamic is still essential. Thus, 'it is *inevitable* that we should, when we defend our religion, be defending at the same time our culture, and vice versa: we are obeying the fundamental instinct to preserve our existence' (p.77 - original emphasis).

But this is not some disinterested treatise on the historical record of accord and factionalism in Christian belief and practice, undertaken in conformity with the authorial plea that 'We must try to start without any bias'. It shows itself to be underpinning the Conservative political agenda by becoming more and more a reactionary threnody demonstrating the deleterious effects on religion/culture, as well as the social fabric, of modernity's blurring of hierarchical boundaries and erasure of nonpareil national characteristics with the result that

The organisation of rural society from which the Church of England

⁵⁸ Over a periphrastic historical outline of the Reformation in this chapter, particularly in pages 73-74, Eliot exposes himself to two untoward conclusions: firstly, he writes 'When we consider the Western world, we must recognise that the main cultural tradition has been that corresponding to the Church of Rome.... From this point of view, the separation of Northern Europe, and of England in particular, from communion with Rome represents a division from the main stream of culture.... [A]ll minor religious entities [he explicitly lists these under the category of 'Protestant dissent', that is, 'the Free Churches', together with the Society of Friends' - the Quakers] he dismisses as being 'culturally negligible'. If deference to Rome is the yardstick of cultural legitimacy for 'religious entities', then his own Anglican Church, whatever 'the persistence of [its] culture', becomes marginalised along with the rest; his caution against any assumption that 'a [Christian] sub-culture is necessarily an inferior culture' notwithstanding. Secondly, Eliot seems to undermine his own bilateral rationale of cultural genesis; surely in the development of a reformed, peculiarly Northern Christian Church, an equivalent, distinctively 'Northern', vibrant Protestant culture, something much more than a mere '*diversion* from the main stream of culture', emerged (my emphasis)?

drew much of its cultural strength is in decay; the landed gentry have less security, less power and less influence; the families which have risen in trade and in many places succeeded to territorial proprietorship are themselves progressively reduced and impoverished. A diminishing number of Anglican clergy come from public schools or the old universities, or are educated at their families' expense; bishops are not wealthy men, and are embarrassed at keeping up palaces. Anglican and Free Church laymen have been educated at the same universities and often at the same schools. And finally, they are all exposed to the same environment of a culture severed from religion (p.79).

It might reasonably have been expected that, given this last and most mortifying development - a culture, and with it, a society and a nation 'severed' from religion - the timely first step from Christian sectarianism to reunifying ecumenicalism would be embraced, but not so. Eliot's concern is rather that the parties to any Christian reunion, in particular his own creed of 'high church' Anglo-Catholicism, might come to lose their unique and elitist particularity; hence he is 'much concerned with the danger that reunion facilitated by the disappearance of the cultural characteristics of the several bodies reunited might accelerate and confirm the general lowering of culture' (p.79). However great his desire to see a reinvigorated Christian church pilot modern society back along the path to God, any loss of cultural exclusivity and ritualism which has an egalitarianism whiff, is, for a conservative churchman of Eliot's ilk, too high a price to pay. As with his arguments over culture and social class, this is syllogistically demonstrated in a blatant three-step process: first, we are to accept 'high' culture as the restricted capital of 'high' social class; rarified culture is therefore no more accessible to everyone as of right than is gentrified social status itself. Further, this esoteric culture, misleadingly described as a 'main' culture, and therefore the variety that matters most, will always count in a way that a 'sub-culture' (even - especially - where the latter attracts more adherents) does not. Finally, since culture and religion have throughout the text been tendered as freely transposable ('culture being essentially, the incarnation ... of the religion of a people' [p.28]), 'main' culture has reverted to 'main' religion and so

It is always the main religious body which is the guardian of more of the remains of the higher developments of culture ... Not only is it the main religious body which has the more elaborated theology; it is the main religious body which is the least alienated from the best intellectual and artistic activity of its time. Hence it is that ... the convert of the intellectual or sensitive type is drawn towards the more *Catholic* type of worship and doctrine (p.80 - my emphasis).

From all this we may deduce that, in just the same way as it is their preordained entitlement to social rank, erudite culture is the rightful domain of the elite; further, that

'main' (Catholic, Orthodox) religion is the institutional custodian of that esteemable culture most fitted by tradition and perpetuity, and that 'convert[s] of the intellectual or sensitive type' (like himself) are in consequence the ones most eligible to fill the highest cultural (and social) ranks - the sequel is an ideal formula for a conservative Eliotic Elysium shored up by a system of intellectual and aesthetic meritocracy, theocratic fundamentalism, and, of course, political Conservatism.

However, intellection and sensitivity are not essential preconditions for the commitment to faith; as the epigram has it 'Christianity is caught, rather than taught', or as Eliot himself once put it 'In the end, one either believes or does not believe'. Any factor, unassuming piety apart, which leads the convert to espouse Christianity may, as Eliot says, 'be cited by the outsider as evidence that the convert has become a Christian for the wrong reasons, or that he is guilty of insincerity and affectation ... the pretence of religious faith may often enough have cloaked intellectual or artistic vanity and self-indulgence' (pp.80-81). But any arrival at faith through incipient affinities with culture, ritual, and tradition, like his, remains unconvincing, however much he may choose to argue that 'on the view of the intimacy of religion and culture which is the starting point of my examination, such phenomena as the progress to religious faith through cultural attraction are both natural and acceptable' (p.81). Eliot's Christian probity, if not his political credibility, might have been better served had he been content to stop at drawing cultural theory into his religious net and forgo his preoccupation with social class. But while the political Conservative can defend a system of social hierarchy and versions of aristocracy without fear of self-contradiction, when that political Conservative is also a devout Christian a conundrum arises between their their innate elitist tendencies and their Pauline commission to proclaim (and share) their faith. In Eliot's case, the unlikely event that his most Orthodox variant of the Catholic faith should reclaim a universal following would cause much of its *recherché* appeal to be lost; this explains on two counts his iteration of the merits of stratification in the social structure sustained by some sort of mutual contrariety and his lukewarm gestures towards Christian reunion and internationalism: 'in the relation between the social classes ... it would seem that a constant struggle [that condition of low level perpetual tension already referred to which will ensure that conflict is appeased and so never escalates] between the centripetal and centrifugal forces is desirable. For without the struggle no balance can be maintained; and if either force won the result would be deplorable' (p.82).⁵⁹ While he acknowledges that world Christendom 'should be one' he makes no attempt at working out the implementation of modern confederation because

⁵⁹ Since they are not explained, we are free to speculate upon the use of the terms 'centripetal' and 'centrifugal' as being synonyms for 'extreme reactionary' and 'liberal democratic' respectively.

(this is now the post-war Eliot speaking) 'the form of organisation, and the locus of powers in that unity is a question upon which we cannot pronounce'. Chastened by recent history perhaps, he now advocates diversity as the best guarantor of stability on the valent cultural front because 'We have already found the culture of a nation prospers with the prosperity of the culture of its several constituents, both geographical and social; but ... it also needs to be itself a part of a larger culture, which requires the ultimate ideal, however unrealisable, of a "world culture" ' (p.82).

Chapter V, entitled 'A Note on Culture and Politics' attempts to locate the practising of politics in the kind of cellular, yet interlinked society Eliot has been so far advocating. Naturally enough, in his Conservative archetype of 'a healthily *regional* ... healthily *stratified* society' (what he earlier passed off in Chapter II as a 'graded' society), a hereditary aristocracy, justified by an obsolescent *noblesse oblige* and grudgingly augmented by the fruits of a more modern meritocracy, would continue to dominate an executive structure in which

public affairs would be a responsibility not equally borne: a greater responsibility would be inherited by those who inherited special advantages, and in whom self-interest, and interest for the sake of their families ('a stake in the country') should cohere with public spirit. The governing elite, of the nation as a whole, would consist of those whose responsibility was inherited with their affluence and position, and whose forces were constantly increased and often led, by rising individuals of exceptional talents (pp. 83-84).⁶⁰

Eliot begs direct comparison with Plato when he discusses the prerequisites of those intended for political leadership: 'It is always desirable that a part of the education of those persons who are either born into, or qualified by their abilities to enter, the superior political grades of society, should be instruction in history, and ... the history of political theory [particularly] ... the study of Greek history and Greek political theory' (p.88). His discussion moves on to the twentieth-century phenomenon of charismatic mass political movements, though having been wooed by both of their extremities at different prewar stages (see the earlier volumes of social criticism and journalistic forays in *The Criterion*) he, like everyone else, now knows better:

The kind of political theory which has arisen in quite modern times is less concerned with human nature ... Its real data are impersonal forces ... Being occupied with humanity only in the mass, it tends to separate

⁶⁰ Whether this diarchy of aristocracy and (essentially intellectual) meritocracy would embrace the 'affluence and position' of industrial and commercial magnates, Eliot does not make clear. Given his lifelong antipathy to usurious, monopolistic capitalism and his championing of agrarian decentralization, this seems open to doubt.

itself from ethics ... it reduces the proper study of mankind to the last two or three hundred years of man. It too often inculcates a belief in a future inflexibly determined and at the same time in a future which we are wholly free to shape as we like. Modern political thought, inextricably involved with economics and with sociology, preempts to itself the position of queen of the sciences (pp.88-89).

The consequence of this modern preemption for Eliot's all-important cultural model has been one of re-ordering, so that 'Culture itself is regarded either as a negligible by-product which can be left to itself, or as a department of life to be organised in accordance with the particular scheme we favour'. The nineteenth-century proliferation of the social sciences - with political theory and practise monopolizing the cognitive vanguard - had pushed any manifestations of irrationalism, including Eliot's religiously-defined culture, into the margins of extraneity so that the 'unnatural' and disagreeable twentieth-century outcome is now 'the tendency of politics to dominate culture, instead of keeping to its place within a culture' (p.107).

In Chapter VI, 'Notes on Education and Culture: and Conclusion', the conservative didact is not unpredictably incited by another late-modern development, universal education. Despite Eliot's acknowledgement that 'It is not my business, nor is it within my competence, to review the whole of current educational theory; ... [nevertheless] a few comments on it are in place, because of the close association, in many minds, between education and culture' (p.95). But his effacing cultural brief is soon set aside in a derogating catalogue of any contemporary educational theory which once more locates itself in Enlightenment-conditioned assumptions. These (variously reproduced) include educational ideals as serving the ends of a 'full democracy', enhancing libertarianism and 'the reconciliation of individual uniqueness with social unity', fulfilling vocational and societal necessity by way of 'training the sort of men and women the age needs', and finally, education as a kind of universal good (here requoting William Godwin): 'the true object of education ... is the generation of happiness' (pp.96-97). While he reluctantly accepts the utility if not the sentiments behind the notion that 'Education of the young to play their part in a democracy is a necessary adaptation of individual to environment, if a democracy is what he is going to play his part in', the real brunt of Eliot's disapproval lies with modern education's socially purposive rather than culturally consecrative role - 'the enthusiasm with which education has been taken up as an instrument for the realisation of social ideals' - rather than the endorsement of traditionally bookish and discriminatory 'civilizing' ends, that is, 'as a means of acquiring *wisdom*; ... the acquisition of *knowledge* for the satisfaction of curiosity, without any further motive than the desire to know ... [coupled with] respect for *learning*' (p.99 - original emphases).

Eliot proceeds against the Godwinian proposal 'that education makes people

happier' by falling back upon the Conservative platitude of social predetermination and class-essentialism, befogging what he observed in Chapter II about meritocracy. Thus it is that 'to be educated above the level of those whose social habits and tastes one has inherited, may cause a division within a man which interferes with happiness, even though, when the individual is of superior intellect, it may bring him a fuller and more useful life ... too much education, like too little education, can produce unhappiness' (pp.99-100). The belief of social reformers that 'education is something that everyone wants' is greeted with a patronising dismissal of proletarian motivation: 'we may conjecture that facility of education will lead to indifference ... and that the universal imposition of education up to the years of maturity will lead to hostility towards it'. And in moving to a discussion of the merits of education being organised 'so as to give "equality of opportunity" ' (what Eliot in a footnote calls 'Jacobinism in Education'), we find him dropping any vestigial democratic or populist mask and placing his 'educational' agenda out in the open. It is squarely to

help to preserve the class and to select the elite ... the ideal of an educational system which would automatically sort out everyone according to his native capacities is unattainable in practice; and ... would disorganise society and debase education. It would disorganise society, by substituting for classes, elites of brains, or perhaps only of sharp wits ... Furthermore, the ideal of a uniform system such that no one capable of receiving higher education could fail to get it, leads imperceptibly to the education of too many people, and consequently to the lowering of standards to whatever this swollen number of candidates is able to reach (p.101 - my emphasis).

Conservatism has a fundamental objection to universal education because of its socially transformative powers; education facilitates the realisation of individual potential in a way which is ultimately fatal for birthright and the traditional structures of society, particularly the Church, the class system, and the patriarchal family unit. When wide-scale erudition is compulsorily imparted by secular state institution, cultural continuity and family authority are among the first casualties, which is why Eliot would preserve the status of both by entrusting the family with the primary task of inculturation.⁶¹ It is no accident that the decline of the two has been inter-related: 'Instead of congratulating ourselves on our progress, ... we might do better to admit that we have arrived at a stage of civilisation at which the family is irresponsible, or incompetent, or helpless; at which parents cannot be expected to train their children

⁶¹ As he said at p.43 'The primary channel of the transmission of culture is the family: no man wholly escapes from the kind, or wholly surpasses the degree, of culture which he acquired from his early environment'.

properly; at which many parents cannot afford to feed them properly, and would not know how, even if they had the means; and that education must step in and make the best of a bad job' (p.104).

As said, the reactionary is always apprehensive of universal education because it stimulates revaluation of traditions as well as social mobility. In all of his prose, Eliot never misses the opportunity to disparage it, as here with the gibe 'The disintegration of class has induced the expansion of envy, which provides ample fuel for the flame of "equal opportunity" '. Nothing, in fact, is more revealing of the antiquarianism and class-consciousness which this chapter has investigated than his views towards what he ironically casts aside as the 'modern phenomenon' of 'half-education':

In earlier ages the majority could not be said to have been 'half-educated' or less: people had the education necessary for the functions they were called upon to perform.... Education in the modern sense implies a disintegrated society ... [E]ducation has become an abstraction.... [I]t is easy to proceed to the conclusion ... that education for everybody is the means we must employ for putting civilization back together again (p.105).

To the end of denouncing universal education and the dangers it presents as a social and cultural 'springboard', Eliot has only familiar recapitulations to offer. The old mantra of exclusively interlocked class-culture warrants requotation only for its increasingly pointed vehemence: 'to aim to make everyone share in the appreciation of the fruits of the more conscious part of culture is to adulterate and cheapen what you give. For it is an essential condition of the preservation of the quality of the culture of the minority, that it should continue to be a minority culture ... A "mass-culture" will always be a substitute-culture; and sooner or later the deception will become apparent to the more intelligent of those upon whom this culture has been palmed off' (pp.106-107). It seems that everyone (except those belonging to what he calls 'the humbler part of society' - presumably the irretrievable working class) is free to admire culture at a safe distance just as they can metaphorically tug their forelock towards their class betters, as long as they accept that they can accede to neither. Eliot's prefatorial smugness about having 'nothing to retract, and nothing upon which I was disposed to enlarge' begins to seem like obduracy with the era of the postmodern rapidly closing; interestingly, his 1965 death and the accelerating disintegration of the structural hierarchies he defended against 'mass-culture' (and 'mass' middle class consumerism) virtually coincide. But even for 1948, it seems like last-gasp antediluvianism to be arguing the negative consequences of modern institutions of education which are

more likely to be good, and not to deliver disappointment, if we are frankly aware of the limits of what we can do with them, and if we combat the delusion that the maladies of the modern world can be put

right by a system of [universal] instruction.... [W]hether education can foster and improve culture or not, it can surely adulterate and degrade it. For there is no doubt that in our headlong rush to educate everybody, we are lowering our standards, and more and more abandoning the study of those subjects by which the essentials of our culture ... are transmitted; destroying our ancient edifices to make ready the ground upon which the barbarian nomads of the future will encamp in their mechanised caravans (pp. 107-108).

Notes Towards the Definition of Culture concludes with an Appendix, entitled 'The Unity of European Culture'. In part III of the same, Eliot is intent on making 'a little clearer' the meaning he gives 'to this word "Culture", which [he has] been using so constantly' (and, as might be suggested, interpolably) throughout his text. Because there is 'a common element in European culture, an interrelated history of thought and feeling and behaviour, an interchange of arts and of ideas' that for him is mediated by its shared Christian heritage, he is at pains to distinguish 'between the material organisation of Europe, and the spiritual organism of Europe. If the latter dies, then what you organise will not be Europe ... [T]here can be no European culture if [Europe's] several countries are isolated from each other ... [or] are reduced to [mere] identity' (pp.119-120).⁶²

We are at last furnished with an Eliotic definition of 'culture' and find it to have a sort of pan-European inclusiveness which consummates the Anglocentricity of what has gone before. Now, first of all, it means 'what the anthropologists mean: the way of life of a particular people living together in one place. That culture is made visible in their arts, in their social system, in their habits and customs, in their religion' (p.120). Despite Eliot's previous refusal 'to separate the world into quite unrelated cultural groups ... to draw any absolute line between East and West, between Europe and Asia', the fact that Europe enjoys 'certain common features' (p.121), requires that it (special case that it is) must nevertheless be delineated behind an 'absolute line' of classical heritage and religious tradition. Sure enough, Europe's vital characteristic is the Christian faith: 'The dominant force in creating a common culture between peoples ...

⁶² Underlying these comments is an Eliotic angst towards post-war United Nations-superintended internationalism; they maintain a sort of family likeness to his persistent inter-war detractions of the fraternalism of the League of Nations. The atmosphere of post-war rehabilitation with its enthusiasm for a universal language of understanding like Esperanto doubtless explains Eliot's fear that 'there will be no longer any justification for their [the countries of Europe] continuing to speak different languages'. The theme of Europe's cultural and intellectual independence and interdependence was a similarly durable Eliotic credo. As far back as his editorial in *The Criterion* for August 1927 he was talking about 'The European Idea' - 'the necessity to harmonize the interests, and therefore to harmonize first the ideas, of the civilized countries of Western Europe' (pp.97-98).

is religion'. It is 'the common tradition of Christianity which has made Europe what it is ... It is in Christianity that our arts have developed; it is in Christianity that the laws of Europe have - until recently - been rooted. It is against a background of Christianity that all our thought has relevance' (p.122). In the mind of the cultural Nestor who is also a devout Christian, culture cannot survive the abstraction of its religious cornerstone; when asserting that 'If Christianity goes, the whole of our European culture goes' his Conservative partiality causes him to miss the point entirely that culture *qua* culture is like the Hydra and cannot, however it be radically mutilated, 'go'. (And as we latter-day products of Cultural Theory readily accept, it is in any event in a constant state of 'becoming'.) But for Eliot, of course (as adumbrated in all of his 'social criticism' and dramatic output, and most of his poetry and literary criticism), a collective European civilisation which is no longer defined by Christianity has forfeited its fundamental cultural, ethical, and intellectual legitimacy. *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* cannot close without a superabundant reminder to the late-modern reader that it is

To our Christian heritage we owe many things beside religious faith. Through it we trace the evolution of our arts, through it we have our conception of Roman Law which has done so much to shape the Western World, through it we have our conceptions of private and public morality. And through it we have our common standards of literature ... What I wish to say is, that this [Christian] unity in the common elements of culture, throughout many centuries, is the true bond between us. No political and economic organisation, however much goodwill it commands, can supply what this culture unity [*sic*] gives (pp.122-123).⁶³

Eliot's 'last appeal is to the men of letters of Europe, who have a special responsibility for the preservation and transmission of our common culture' (p.123). There is a sort of symmetry in this entreaty in that the arch political and social railer has recaptured the ideal of impartiality he professed while editor of *The Criterion* two and three decades before, so that [although]

We [Europeans] may hold very different political views: our common responsibility is to preserve our common culture uncontaminated by political influences ... What matters is our inability, without each other, to produce those excellent works which mark a superior civilisation ... [and] at least try to save something of those goods of which we are the common trustees: the legacy of Greece, Rome and Israel, and the legacy of Europe throughout the last 2,000 years. In a world which has seen such material devastation as ours, these spiritual possessions are also in

⁶³ The unavoidable inclusion of pagan elements in any inventory of our civilizing inheritance is surely a concession that European culture is more than narrowly Christian.

imminent peril (pp.123-124).⁶⁴

Throughout this text, Eliot's every cultural pronouncement has incidentally confirmed Marx's contention that culture is never politically disinterested. Eliot's very purpose has, in fact, been to intertwine culture and class to the political end of social resegregation and to protectively fence around the 'highest' issue in both spheres in the face of a post-war fall-out of internationalism and egalitarianism. And the last component in this archaic triangulation is to be, of course, the Christian Church, sacred custodian of those 'spiritual possessions'; a Church, moreover, restored to its historical capacity for temporal interposition as and when occasion demands. And having 'played at politics' throughout three decades and three volumes of social criticism, it is plainly untenable for Eliot to come out at their conclusion on the side of a sovereign European culture quite 'uncontaminated by political influences'.

Eliot, having lost the political argument to recent history, becomes unmasked in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. On the evidence of this text, nine years and the most frightful conflagration in human history have, in him, changed nothing. What we find instead is an unreconstituted die-hard offering a protean nod in the direction of an integrated modern society and the new internationalism when this, for him, would remain what it had always been: a world that 'moves / In appetency, on its metalled ways'.

⁶⁴ Predictably, Britain has a crucial role in this process of cultural salvage. As Eliot had written twenty years before '[T]he peculiar position of Britain is this: that she is on the one hand a part of Europe. But not only a part, she is a mediating part: for Britain is the bridge between Latin culture and Germanic culture in both of which she shares. But Britain is not only the bridge, the middle way, between two parts of Western Europe; she is ... [thanks to her then empire] the connection between Europe and the rest of the world' (editorial to *The Criterion* for March 1928, p.194).

CHAPTER 4

EDITORSHIP OF *THE CRITERION*, 1922 - 1939

(i)

[The modern state was] born in sin, the bastard offspring of declining autocracy and bureaucracy run amok ... [it is] a giant wielded by pygmies
(Honore de Balzac).

(ii)

criterion (n): A test, principle, rule,
canon, or standard, by which anything is judged or estimated (*OED*).

The most sustained forum for the insinuated dispersion of Eliot's politics and ideology was provided by his unbroken sixteen-plus years' editorship of the literary review *The Criterion*. This journal, which was in line of succession to the defunct *Art and Letters* and *The New Age*, had seventy-one issues between October 1922 and January 1939; as Eliot said about it in his Appendix to *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* 'its life covered nearly the same period that we call the years of peace' (p.115). Relative 'years of peace' though they may have been, the political temper of those years justifies in part his own attribution of the ultimate 'failure' of the journal 'to the gradual closing of the mental frontiers of Europe. A kind of cultural autarky followed inevitably upon political and economic autarky' (*ibid.*, p.116). In a recapitulation of the journal's history in the same citation he claims for it a non-partisan character, saying that 'The question of a writer's political, social, or religious views simply did not enter into our [editorial] calculations ... The ideas with which you did not agree, the opinions which you could not accept, were ... examined ... without hostility, and with the assurance that you could learn from them.... [I]t was our business not so much to make any particular ideas prevail, as to maintain intellectual activity on the highest level' (pp.117-118). However, this statement of editorial objectivity is not supported by the preponderance of reactionary (and Orthodox Christian) opinion to be found among the journal's pages, particularly as its second 1930s phase wore on, and prompts the Eliotic unbosoming which immediately follows: 'I do not think that *The Criterion*, in its final years, wholly succeeded in living up to this ideal. I think that in the later years *it tended to reflect a particular point of view*, rather than to illustrate a variety of views on that plane. But I

do not think that this was altogether the fault of the editor: I think it came about partly from the pressure of circumstances of which I have spoken' (p.118 - my emphasis).⁶⁵ The 'particular point of view' referred to was a broadly Conservative doctrinalism, and that unspecified 'pressure of circumstances' the increasingly right-leaning political climate which so characterized the decade of the 1930s, rendering inevitable perhaps the blurring of the tripartition of culture-Christianity-Conservatism with which this thesis is concerned and the infraction which he here confesses, that is, 'the confusion of culture and politics'.

As said, at the evidential level of the actual contributions and the writer's laborious analysis of their reactionary tenor, Eliot's protestations of political impartiality plainly cannot be upheld, but there is not the opportunity here to traverse the many such articles.⁶⁶ This chapter will mostly limit itself therefore to the more overtly political of Eliot's editorials.

In the fledgling review's second issue for January 1923, Eliot offers (as contributor) a eulogy to the late music hall artist supreme, Marie Lloyd. Eliot salutes the variety hall as a befitting working-class cultural institution, and laments its passing, along with its more eminent practitioners like Lloyd, whom he idealizes as 'the expressive figure of the lower classes'. The middle classes, by contrast, 'have no such idol: the middle

⁶⁵ In turn, this admission is at variance with his somewhat self-satisfied Preface to the Faber and Faber-published eighteen volume Collected Edition of the magazine which did not appear until 1967, two years after his death. There he writes: 'Throughout [*The Criterion's* publication] I had always two aims in view: to present to English readers, by essays and short stories, the work of important new foreign writers, and to offer longer and more deliberate reviews than was possible in magazines of more frequent appearance. I think that both of my aims were realised, and that the seventeen volumes [in actual fact there are, with indexes, eighteen volumes] of *The Criterion* constitute a valuable record of the thought of that period between the wars'.

⁶⁶ For a short selection of such (reactionary) articles, however, see Appendix B. And for a feature-length treatment of one of the most regular of this category of contributor, see Jason Harding's 'A useful irritant: Montgomery Belgion, T.S. Eliot and the *Criterion*' (*The Times Literary Supplement*, August 25, 2000). By 'useful', Harding means 'serviceable to the journal's Editor'. The staunchly obscurantist (and later Holocaust-denying and Nuremberg war trials-denouncing) Belgion, in Harding's words 'continued to be a mainstay of the *Criterion*: an agent provocateur who could be relied upon to stoke up the coals of controversy on carefully selected topics. He contributed more than sixty book reviews and short notices [to it] during the 1930s'. Harding's claim that 'the close relationship between Eliot and Belgion [is] a collaboration with far-reaching implications for our understanding of the *Criterion's* ideological character in the 1930s and of Eliot's policy as Editor' plainly endorses my repudiation of Eliot's avowals of unbiased.

classes are morally corrupt.... The middle classes, in England as elsewhere, under democracy, are morally dependent upon the aristocracy, and the aristocracy are morally in fear of the middle class, which is gradually absorbing and destroying them'. Changes in the forms of cultural expression will cause the collapse of social stability and so, 'With the decay of the music-hall, with the encroachment of the cheap and rapid breeding cinema, the lower classes will tend to drop into the same state of protoplasm as the bourgeoisie ... that same listless apathy with which the middle and upper classes regard any entertainment of the nature of art' (pp194-195).⁶⁷ Eliot's generous if unlikely commendation of Marie Lloyd's working-class level art is consistent with ideas of class-cultural 'differentiation' he was still extolling in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* a quarter of a century later; hers is an instance of 'that culture which they [the "uneducated" mass of the population] should possess', and presumably find contented distraction in (p.106).

After overseeing this and four more issues of *The Criterion*, Eliot resigned his job with Lloyds Bank to assume full-time editorship of the journal, celebrating his new role with the same masthead editorial 'Commentary' to the April 1924 number which would henceforth preface succeeding issues until the leader format changed, for reasons unexplained, at the beginning of the 1930s. And it seems that in this full, five page inauguration he was at pains to stamp a Conservative cast on the journal, taking for his inspiration the antihumanism of the late T.E. Hulme, whom he encomiastically describes as

the forerunner of a new attitude of mind, which should be the twentieth-century mind, if the twentieth-century is to have a mind of its own. Hulme is classical, reactionary, and revolutionary; he is the antipodes of the eclectic, tolerant, and democratic mind of the nineteenth century ... his closest affinities [as Eliot was in a better position than most to judge] are in France, with Charles Maurras, Albert Sorel, and Pierre Lasserre (p.231).⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Warming to his anti-modern outcry, he concludes with the augury that 'When every theatre has been replaced by 100 cinemas, when every musical instrument has been replaced by 100 gramophones, when every horse has been replaced by 100 cheap motor-cars ... when applied science has done everything possible with the materials on this earth to make life as interesting as possible, it will not be surprising if the population of the entire civilised world rapidly follows the fate of the Melanesians' viz., 'dying from pure boredom' (p.195).

⁶⁸ As Ronald Schuchard confirms 'Hulme finally begins to emerge as the chief figure among those who stand behind the formulation of Eliot's moral and aesthetic canon' (*Eliot's Dark Angel*, p.69) And while not French but American, among these attributions Eliot could also have cited Hulme's 'affinities' with Paul Elmer More, another leading figure in the early twentieth century's Conservative disparagement of

This is clearly more than a salutation to a late reactionary; contextually, it amounts to a journalistic declaration of allegiance to the principles of reactionary 'classicism' and thus opposition to its antinomy, democratic liberalism, with all of the latter's modern excrescences. And strikingly, there follows the augury, seemingly overlooked by most Modernist interpreters, which establishes the political nexus between Conservative politics (this was the 1920s mid-point of 'high' Modernism) and contemporary literature: 'Classicism is in a sense reactionary, but it must be in a profounder sense revolutionary. A new classical age will be reached when the dogma, or ideology, of the [disabused political and sociological] critics is so modified by contact with creative writing, and when the [disabused Modernist] creative writers are so permeated with the new dogma, that a state of equilibrium is reached' (p.232 - original emphasis).⁶⁹ In two sentences, the way forward into an alternative, new classical age is established, however, this classicism is to move with the times by wedding the time-honoured, reforming power of (literary) art with the charismatic end-product of an equally venerable rhetorical tradition - ideology. It is this factor that would make for a novel classicism - a classicism in Eliot's words 'in a profounder sense revolutionary' - where ideologues of the Right, Conservative political machinators, and sympathetically malleable writers would between them contrive a new order of political and cultural confederation; in other words, a Modernism with 'teeth'. Like contemporaneous Central European political movements this arrangement might be revolutionary in semblance, but far from revolutionary in its objectives. And those expressions of 'outside authority', as for all reactionaries, would be embedded in the structure of the hierarchical social collective and an authoritarian state, the entirety overseen by monarchical, and ultimately divine, authority. Diligent modern observer that he was, Eliot had by 1924 seen enough (and protested enough) supersession of culture to know that ideology and aesthetics could never make an equal marriage; that hoped-for 'equilibrium' would always operate to the detriment of 'creative writing'. That he knew this and was undeterred by the prospect of paying what would amount to a ransom in cultural capital offers yet more support for the writer's contention that his first loyalty was to reactionary politics, not literary art.⁷⁰

Romanticism. (Eliot marked More's death with a heartfelt eulogy in *The Criterion* for July, 1937.)

⁶⁹ Frank Kermode underscores this improbable alliance by observing that 'the radical thinking of the early modernists about the arts implied, in other spheres [that is, the political and social], opinions of a sort not normally associated with the word radical' (*The Sense of an Ending*, p.110).

⁷⁰ In his *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot*, the general impression left by William Chace is of an Eliot virtually obsessed with politics, which immediately brings to mind George Saintsbury's judgement of Matthew Arnold that 'he seems to have grown rather cold towards the Muses ...

In another part of the same editorial, Eliot rises to the bait cast by Bertrand Russell, who had written *inter alia* in the New York-based journal *The Dial* of the previous month: 'Until "culture" has made its peace with science it will remain outside the main current of events, feeble and querulous, sighing for the past'. Eliot replies 'One is immediately struck by the arrogance of the scientist ... the truth seems to us to be exactly the reverse of Mr Russell's implication. The man of letters or the man of "culture" of the present time is far too easily impressed and overawed by scientific knowledge and ability; the aristocracy of culture has abdicated before the demagoguery of science'. In fact, so chafed seems Eliot that he responds with an irrelevant reactionary *tic*: 'democracy appears whenever the governors of the people lose the conviction of their right to govern: the claims of the scientists are fortified by the cowardice of men of letters' (pp.232-233). Once again, the inference is that a new breed of uncowed 'men of letters' will henceforth, taking fascist sympathisers like Pound, Lewis, and Roy Campbell as their models, step out from behind the cover of art and wed belligerent political and social 'dogma or ideology' to their craft, precisely as Pound was already doing with his multiform *Cantos*. But any enterprise of this kind merely underscores the central irony in the entire (high) Modernist project; behind the Poundian imperative to 'make it [strictly art] new' lies the unspoken counterfoil to keep Western political, economic, and social systems immutable; immutable, that is, once they have been made to retrocede to some idealized model from some ephemeral thirteenth, early fourteenth-century hiatus, and conform to a political and social archetype fettered by cultural icons as remote as Daniel, Cavalcanti, and Dante.

Finally, in the second of two theatre reviews, that of a performance by the Phoenix Society of *King Lear*, there is an entirely gratuitous calumny of contemporary democracy. Asserting that 'The play of *King Lear* can never be popular in a civilisation so corrupted with literary culture that it resents what it cannot diminish', his slur continues, without any pretence at substantiation: 'This aversion for the work of art, this preference for the derivative, the marginal, is an aspect of the modern democracy of culture. We say democracy advisedly: that meanness of spirit, that egotism of motive, that incapacity for surrender or allegiance to something outside of one-self, which is a frequent symptom of the soul of man under democracy. The prospects for the theatre, therefore, are not encouraging' (p.235).⁷¹ In making such splenetic assertions, shored

Social, political, and religious matters tempted him away from literature' (quoted in *Matthew Arnold: Selected Prose*, edited by P.J. Keating [Introduction, p.9]).

⁷¹ In the renamed *New Criterion* for June 1926, he expresses similar sentiments in opposing the concept of a national (and therefore 'popular') theatre: 'Civilisation, culture, and enjoyment of anything intellectual being suspect, they [social reformers and philanthropists] cannot pass authority unless

up by his cliquish annexation of interpretive superiority `that *King Lear* is a work of such immense power that it offends and scandalises ordinary citizens of both sexes', Eliot himself displays the `meanness of spirit and egotism of motive' he condemns in others to pluck at the most meagre political straws. In sum, even Eliot's *ab initio* *Criterion* editorial pronouncements, dated as they are April 1924, support my contention that if early Modernism *was* primarily an aesthetic movement, by the time of its 1920s `high' midpoint incarnation it had long since crossed over into politics and marked out a trend of reaction which was to hold centre stage until it was challenged (but never displaced) by the more broad-spectrum Leftist Modernism of the mid-late 1930s.⁷² The vehemence of these early *Criterion* editorials can only suggest that Eliot was intent on stamping the journal's reactionary temper from the very outset.

In his `Commentary' to the following number for July 1924 under the caption of `Criticism', Eliot writes `There has been a growing and alarming tendency in our time for literary criticism to be something else; to be the expression of an attitude "toward life" or of an attitude toward religion or of an attitude toward society, or of various humanitarian emotions.... Of all these tendencies toward obliteration of distinctions, the most dangerous is the tendency to confuse literature with religion - a tendency which can only have the effect of degrading literature and annihilating religion' (p.373). The timing of this editorial remonstrance, clearly a tentative expression of the New Criticism in literary theory, probably reflects the influence of I.A.Richards, an occasional contributor to the *The Criterion*, whose *Principles of Literary Criticism* had just been published (and was to be approvingly reviewed in the journal three issues later by Herbert Read). But as a condemnation of emerging critical trends it seems flimsy, if not hypocritical, coming from someone who made religious *obiter dicta* the nexus of his journalistic decrees and whose own influential literary analyses blurred these boundaries at will. The years must have erased Eliot's memory of this early *Criterion* utterance; consider the pronounced interconnectedness of `literature' and `religion' expressed in the explicitly-titled essay `Religion and Literature' of 1935, and the tangential antihumanitarianism of an earlier piece, `The Humanism of Irving Babbitt' of

disguised beneath the dim word "education" - a word which has lost almost all meaning, but which still fortifies in utilitarian and democratic odour. A National Theatre is not a thing to educate anybody' (p.418).

⁷² In his *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*, Mark Mazower affirms the increasingly reactionary trend in Europe between the wars by stating that `By the 1930s, parliaments seemed to be going the way of kings. The Left had been vanquished or forced on to the defensive nearly everywhere west of the Soviet Union, and all the key political debates were taking place on the Right. Only on the continent's Northern fringes did effective parliamentary rule survive' (pp. 2-3).

1928. Certainly 'humanitarian emotions' figured little in his criticism just as there is scant depiction of them in the poetry; these are studied omissions mostly owed to the Maurrasian-Hulmeian legacy (subsequently amplified by Christian Orthodoxy), for which he was the Modernist conduit nonpareil ('The trilling wire in the blood / Sings below inveterate scars'). And the fact that this editorial predated his Anglo-Catholic conversion by three years may help explain the deaf ear he was to turn towards the last and most serious of his own admonitions, because however 'dangerous the tendency to confuse literature with religion', in the poetry and drama (and criticism) still to come Eliot would have no rival as the literary Modernist who assiduously traced the faultline between a declining faith and imputably declining standards in literary culture, apparently to try to emulate the austerity of his hero Dante and become the religious poet offering assuagement to troubled temporal society. In this light, how is it possible that the author of *The Waste Land* and the critic who once penned that a poem should be treated 'primarily as poetry and not another thing' could have been one and the same? The insubstantial New Critical schism between literary artefact and extraneous interpretation is surely the more strained when the roles of augural poet and influential critic are combined in a single writer, and in one who knowingly counterpoises his work in opposition to a time of socio-political transition and uncertainty. Eliot's apparent volte-face from rhetorical pronouncement to didactical practise points, not for the first time or the last, towards a strained literary duality between two Eliotic personalities and their two performative roles: the first, the (increasingly private, religious) poet-playwright, and the second, a sort of Modernist reluctant hero, struggling to find reconciliation with the roles of celebrated cultural commissar and critic.⁷³

The editorial 'Commentary' to the January 1925 issue contains two book reviews: D.C. Somervell's *Selections from Matthew Arnold's Prose*, and Leon Trotsky's *Problems of Life* (the latter scrutinized under the mocking caption 'Light from the East'), both published by Methuen. Normally no admirer of Arnold ('his thought lacks the logical rigour of his master Newman; his taste is biased by convictions and prejudices'), Eliot quotes what is, for him, the 'only one regrettable omission' from Somervell's selections: the passage on Oxford in "Culture and Anarchy" ':

We have not won our political battles, we have not carried our main points, we have not stopped our adversaries' advance, we have not marched victoriously with the modern world; but we have told silently upon the mind of the country, we have prepared currents of feeling which sap our adversaries' position when it seems gained, we have kept

⁷³ This tension was undoubtedly at its peak, as here (1924), midway between the 1922 publication of *The Waste Land* and his 1927 conversion, the act which surprised and chagrined so many of his peers.

up our own communications with the future (p. 162 - italicized in the original).

In 1925, these politico-cultural words could have sprung from the mouth of any Modernist of the time, not least Eliot's, and as such they require no paraphrase. In consequence, it is not surprising that Arnold has abruptly grown in Eliot's estimation: 'This is the Arnold who is capable of being a perpetual inspiration.... Were he alive today he would find Populace and Barbarians more philistinised, and Philistia more barbaric and proletarianised, than in his own time. The greatest, the only possible victory for Arnold and his disciples is to continue to "keep up the communications" with the future and with the past'.⁷⁴ Eliot endorses such a maintenance of cultural correspondences for the reason that it yokes a better past to a still-redeemable future, while rendering the present endurable.

In the Trotsky review, Eliot admits to anticipating 'an exposition of a culture repellent to my own disposition' and the Soviet revolutionary (whose portrait 'shows a slight resemblance to the face of Mr Sidney Webb'), is rebuked as 'the Eastern prophet of the new [modern] age speaking in the smuggest tones of a New Bourgeoisie' for blasphemously extolling the cinema over the Church as a medium of amusement and education (see footnote 37). This 'Commentary' features another of those Eliotic catalogues of the modern social reforms he finds so abhorrent. Eliot can find justification in a revolution as cataclysmic as even the Russian one 'if it produces something really *new*' (original emphasis) but not if it furnishes mere mass-scale welfarism like 'the dreary picture of Montessori schools, playing fields, plasticene, club-houses, communal kitchens, creches, abstinence from swearing and alcohol, a population warmly clad ... and with its mind filled ... with nineteenth-century superstitions about Nature and her forces' (p.163). While the reality of Soviet post-revolutionary life fell some way short of this Trotskyist Utopia (and was soon to become horrifically worse), the Christian and Conservative reflexes towards temporal ameliorism whenever this is delivered by the agency of revolution are here crudely displayed.

With the January 1926 issue, Eliot apparently felt the need to effectively re-launch the journal (briefly renaming it *The New Criterion*), presenting a reinscribed statement of editorial objectives under the title 'The Idea of a Literary Review'. In this manifesto, he is at pains to emphasise that 'the review which propagates the ideas of a single man, or the views and fancies of a small group, is ... evidently obnoxious.... Above all the

⁷⁴ Arnold's perception of modern life as 'a strange disease' along with utterances like 'religion can be defined as morality touched by emotion' and 'the object of religion ... is [social] conduct' (here drawn from his *Literature and Dogma* of 1873), would have done much to win over Eliot.

literary review ... must protect its disinterestedness, must avoid the temptation ever to appeal to any social, political or theological prejudices'.

Having laboured over four pages to so persuade us ('Such, then, are the principles which I hold to be valid for any literary review ... I have expressed my aversion to stating any programme or erecting any platform'), Eliot makes an instantaneous U-turn in editorial strategy. At least the reader *is* given warning; while the magazine will eschew 'prejudices', 'programmes' and 'platforms' of the political or other kinds, its editor 'cannot help substituting personal tendencies for those which are impersonal and existing in the outside world'. Predicated on the minute semantic discordance between 'prejudice' and 'personal tendency', the innate biases of the journal's custodian will displace or abate consideration of empirical social realities whenever these seem to him uncongenial. The objective ideal, plausibly expounded until the previous paragraph, has been quickly abandoned to interpretive inevitability: 'from this dilemma there is no escape, and the reader must make his own reserves and deductions accordingly'. And the singular 'personal tendency' which this editor nurtures is a predilection towards the by-now-familiar 'classical' delineations of T.E. Hulme and the outspoken coterie of French reaction responsible for its spawning, *l'Action française*. Hence, it is his belief that 'the modern tendency is toward something which, for want of a better name, we may call classicism ... a tendency - discernable even in art - toward a higher and clearer conception of Reason, and a more severe and serene control of the emotions by Reason' (p.5).

To bear out this restated credo, Eliot presents a one-sided reading list of 'a few books, not all very recent, which to my mind exemplify this tendency'. This bibliography, however 'extremely divergent' in its 'theories and points of view' in his estimation, constitutes a veritable pantheon of authors and works variously questioning the post-Romantic, liberal democratic or broadly humanitarian paradigm, and quite gives the lie to that professed editorial aversion 'to stating any programme'. Featured are *Reflexions sur la violence*, by Georges Sorel; *L'Avenir de L'intelligence*, by Charles Maurras; *Belphegor*, by Julien Benda; *Speculations*, by T.E. Hulme; *Reflexions sur l'intelligence*, by Jacques Maritain; [and] *Democracy and Leadership*, by Irving Babbitt. And so as to bring home this broad-spectrum reactionary versus socialist antinomy, the above list is played off against one from the 'enemy' camp. This comprises 'another group of books ... that part of the present which is already dead: *Christina Alberta's Father*, by H.G. Wells; *St. Joan*, by Bernard Shaw; and *What I Believe*, by Bertrand Russell.... [T]hese writers ... all have their moments ... [but] they all exhibit intelligence at the mercy of emotion'. Similar to his barbs against Lawrence in *After Strange Gods*, this polarised mentality over literature is fallaciously extended to an ascription of distorted religious belief as being the cause of his opponents' 'errors'. To a man, Wells,

Shaw, and Russell would have scorned being told 'they all hold curious amateur religions based apparently upon amateur or second-hand biology, and on *The Way of all Flesh*'.⁷⁵ More interesting here is Eliot's choice of inclusive pronouns, which betrays his perception of a predominantly like-minded readership: 'It is not for *us* to sneer at the faith of *those who were born and reared under conditions different from ours ... we must find our own faith*, and having found it, fight for it against all others' (pp.5-6 - my emphases).

In his 'Commentary' to the short-lived '*New Criterion*' of June 1926, Eliot suggests that Wyndham Lewis's new book *The Art of Being Ruled* be added to the first catalogue above because 'Mr Lewis's observations of contemporary society tend toward similar conclusions to those of such critics as Benda, Babbitt, or Maritain ... The artist in the modern world ... is heavily hampered in ways that the public does not understand.... [A]nd he may be driven to examining the elements in the situation - political, social, philosophical or religious - which frustrate his labour' (p.420). These artistic 'frustrations' are not traversed (even though by 1926, Lewis was openly embracing fascism because of its bias towards what he called 'aristocracy of intellect'), but in the following issue for October 1926, in which *The Art of Being Ruled* is reviewed, some of his more severe 'observations of contemporary society' are. Since they have drawn such editorial praise, Lewis's social observations obviously warrant some exposition. The reviewer, W.A. Thorpe, declares that 'Liberalism ... is a late born child of the romantic movement with an odd talent for self-delusion and disguise ... [and in consequence] has thereby lost its aim'. According to Thorpe, 'Mr Lewis [restating the Aristotelian axiom of government "that from the hour of their birth some men are marked out for subjection, others for rule"] voices *the increasing body of opinion which has travelled by the path of socialism towards a belief in order and authority*' (pp.760-763 - my emphasis).⁷⁶

In the above-quoted issue, Eliot, in the capacity of reviewer, critiques Herbert

⁷⁵ Reviewing Russell's monograph *Why I Am Not a Christian* in *The Criterion* for August 1927, Eliot dismisses Russell's political radicalism as 'merely a variety of Whiggery [just as] his Non-Christianity is merely a variety of Low Church sentiment. That is why his pamphlet is a curious, and a pathetic, document' (p.179).

⁷⁶ Thorpe goes on to offer some startling examples of what he calls Lewis's 'embitterment': 'this fungus of delusion - feminism, inversion, the aping of the child, the masculinisation of women, and the effeminisation of men, jazz bands, country cottages (with honeysuckle) and all manner of bastard faiths and flabby intuitions.... Their common character is an industrial romanticism which would escape ... into an easy unreason' (p.763). As early as 1930, Lewis was openly extolling Hitler for his potential to unify 'White Europe' and furnish an 'antidote' to capitalist materialism and Soviet socialism.

Read's *Reason and Romanticism: Essays in Literary Criticism*, drawing his ever-ready distinction between the two fundamental tempers to do with theories of the human: 'The issue is really between those who ... make man *the measure of all things*, and those who would find an extra-human measure. There are those who find this measure in a revealed religion, and those who, like Mr Irving Babbitt and Mr Read, look for it without pretending to have found it' (p.755).

Just one year after the extended editorial manifesto set out in 'The Idea of a Literary Review' Eliot finds himself once more drawn to the journal's defence. In the January 1927 issue he fears that 'To many readers *The New Criterion*, in its first year, may seem to have fallen far short of that idea' (of ideological disinterest). But he simultaneously rehearses commendably iconoclastic objectives ('To be perpetually in change and development, to alter with the alterations of the living minds associated with it [the journal] and with the phases of the contemporary world for which and in which it lives: on this condition only should a literary review be tolerated') while effectively damning it to the same failed outcome by restating a reactionary disposition whose abuse during the past year has seemingly taught him nothing.⁷⁷ The fact that this process of editorial catechism had been publicly enacted twice within one year demonstrates how Eliot could simply never see the wood for the trees because he wanted two things for the journal which were irreconcilable, perhaps because they reflected a fundamental division in his own temperament: the man of literature in him wanted to husband a literary review which would be vital and non-partisan; the Christian in him wanted to preside over a journal which would remain a forum of Conservatism and Orthodox values and display a 'common tendency' of antipathy towards modern socio-political trends. And his use of the term 'collaborator' over 'contributor' (to be fair, probably intended in the lexical sense of 'an associate in literary or scientific endeavour') does have a simultaneous modern meaning connoting political fraternisation and collusion.

With the May 1927 issue, *The Criterion* reverted to its original title-form, and became, after four years of quarterly publication, a monthly; its crypto-political agenda, however, remained unchanged and was painstakingly adumbrated yet again. In his regular editorial discourse, 'A Commentary', Eliot declares that then as now the

⁷⁷ It is simply (reactionary) business as usual: 'The programme of *The New Criterion* ... remains the same ... [as] We said a year ago: "editor and collaborators may freely express their individual opinions and ideas, so long as there is a residue of common tendency" ... The "common tendency" ... cannot but be felt, and it is better that it should be felt than formulated.... *The New Criterion* ... respects independence and originality ... [I]t will also continue its policy of introducing the work of the most important of those European writers who are not known, and who ought to be known, in this country'.

journal's hallmark (by contrast with the 'daily and Sunday newspapers' with their 'Five O'clock Philosophers' which will provide 'the public of the future' with 'all the aliment it requires') is 'a certain corporate personality ... a common tendency which its contributors should illustrate by conformity or opposition.... It is to be up-to-time in its appreciation of modern literature, and in its awareness of contemporary problems ... [and] record the development of modern literature and the mutations of modern thought' (pp.187-189).⁷⁸ This model 'tendency' with which the journal's contributors are to engage is manifestly the Conservative one upheld by its Editor, and intriguingly, 'those [unspecified individuals, presumably directors and shareholders of the publishers, Faber and Faber] chiefly responsible for its character'. A journal which enjoys a reactionary reputation circularly attracts more reactionary sentiment, especially one like this whose purview includes 'contemporary problems and the mutations of modern thought'. As already suggested, perhaps the 'leisure, ripeness and thoroughness of the [literary] reviews of a hundred years ago' provided the sort of even-handed journalistic exemplar the *litterateur* in him wanted to emulate, when *The Criterion's* life throughout the politically churning inter-war era rendered this impossible.

In the succeeding monthly issue for June 1927, Eliot approves the first number of a French bi-monthly political pamphlet, *Les Derniers Jours*, saying closer to home that 'It is a trait of the present time that every "literary" review worth its salt has a political interest; indeed that *only* in the literary reviews ... are there any living political ideas'. Naturally, an English Conservative does not care for the volatility of European politics and so Eliot cools towards the [Oswald] 'Spenglerish' passivity he finds in this French publication:

To assume that everything has changed, is changing, and must change, according to forces which are not human, and that all a person who cares about the future must or can do is to *adapt himself* to the change is a fatalism which is unacceptable.... If we are to be qualified as 'neo-classicists', we hope that 'neo-classicism' may be allowed to comprise the idea that man is responsible, *morally* responsible, for his present and his immediate future (p.283 - original emphases).

'Neo-classicism' leads Eliot to his next item in the same editorial, where another

⁷⁸ Spleen like this against mass circulation journalism signals another Modernist grievance, probably originating with the foundation of the *Daily Mail* back in 1896 and the first mass daily 'workers' paper', the *Daily Herald*, in 1919. Writing about the *Mail* and other dailies in a *Criterion* editorial for July 1930 Eliot described them as 'giv[ing] the people what it wants in the way of insurance, competitions, divorces, society weddings, aviation, football, serials, and interviews of Mr Bernard Shaw with juvenile Hollywood stars' (p.589).

contemporary journal, *The Calendar*, in its April 1927 issue dismisses neo-classicism as 'the literary version of a reactionary Latin philosophy which is being adapted, in one or two English reviews, into a repressive instrument of literary criticism'. (While we may admire *The Calendar's* percipience in so early identifying the parochial nature of what was undoubtedly *The Criterion* with its 'dogma of an exclusive cultural value' it notably omitted, early days in *The Criterion's* annals as this was, the *politically* coercive character of its rival.) In replying, Eliot even seems slightly miffed by the loose reference to 'one or two English reviews' and with it, the suggestion that *The Criterion* has not had the dissemination of those 'French writers whose names are most closely associated in the public mind with the "reactionary Latin philosophy" in question' all to itself. Allowing that the term 'neo-classicism' ... is not particularly commendable; for all "neos" indicate some fad or fashion of the moment, and it is not our concern to be fashionable', Eliot repudiates the charge of 'repression' as 'the cry of a muddled neo-communist against what he believes to be, to adopt his own jargon, a form of neo-fascism'.

Finally, under the mock-serious caption 'The Latest Muscovite Menace', Eliot manages a gratuitous swipe at democratic proletarianism. This extends from the British crowds at 'a Cup Final or Test Match ... [where] a large part of the excitement consists in their singing all together', to the spectacle of 'seeing, from time to time, immense numbers of men and women voting all together, without using their reason and without enquiry'. Worse yet, for Eliot, 'we may presently see them praying and shouting hallelujahs all together, without much theology or knowledge of what they are praying about'. Conservatives and 'Those persons who find even a little stay and comfort in the word "classicism" ' are always, in Eliot's own words, 'at a disadvantage', presumably because (this was 1927, not 1937) they lacked effective political clout. Thus, in choosing to shun likely political confederates from the modern ideological margins, on this occasion the 'Muscovite Menace' (later, in 1939, it was fascism; see the concluding pages to *The Idea of a Christian Society*), Conservatism can find itself uncomfortably rubbing shoulders with its sworn enemy, liberal democracy, from which it must then churlishly dissociate itself. This Eliot does with the caution that democracy will likely amount to nothing more than 'a means of hastening the disappearance of the English Individualist whom we have heard so much about in the past, and his transformation into the microscopic cheese-mite of the great cheese of the future' (p.286).

The editorial to the July 1927 issue holds passing interest because of its Conservative protest against internationalism, even in a field like shared intellectual understandings. Here the League of Nation's formation of a new body, *The International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation* with its twelve objectives (including 'International measures to facilitate the circulation of books and printed

matter', 'International co-operation among museums, exhibitions and libraries', and modishly, 'International measures for the development and improvement of the cinematograph') is questioned because of what Eliot sees as the Institute's 'lack of coherence, of any unifying idea; some of the causes seem rather trifling ... and all are vague'.⁷⁹

Eliot's *Criterion* editorial for November 1927 is particularly relevant. In it, he reports on an international literary symposium convened the previous summer at Pontigny in Burgundy. The business of the gathering is for reasons unexplained not to be published but its prior 33 page prospectus provides what he calls 'an admirable view of the kinds of subject which preoccupy the minds of men of letters to-day. And all the more as many of the writers who were present are occasional contributors to *The Criterion*'. The politicization of the present-day literary scene, evidenced by the quoted topics of discussion: 'Liberty ... with reference to bolshevism, fascism and the other

⁷⁹ Although non-editorial material generally lies beyond the limitations of this thesis, this July issue demands extended scrutiny for Eliot's, and presumably another's, reviews of a cluster of recent right-leaning books 'Each ... seriously concerned with the political and economic anarchy of the present time'. These texts are: Anthony M. Ludovici's *A Defence of Conservatism: A further Text Book for Tories*, G.K. Chesterton's *The Outline of Sanity*, Hilaire Belloc's *The Servile State*, J.A. Hobson's *The Conditions of Industrial Peace*, and seven anonymous authors' *Coal: A Challenge to the National Conscience*. He approves *A Defence of Conservatism*, with one cavil: Ludovici 'isolates politics from economics, and he isolates it [politics] from religion ... He fails with the relation of Church and State'. Chesterton's book is 'brilliant but sporadic' and Belloc's, while not new, is 'still timely ... it deserves new readers ... [for its] thorough-going Romanism ... of politics and economics'. The authors of *Coal* 'are to be praised', though they also disappoint Eliot in failing to exposit the modern relationship between Church and State. Eliot comments '[I]f the Church is to do what they [the authors] want, it must have more power, and if it is to be strengthened, then the Kingship must be strengthened. But *Coal* is a book which everyone ought to read, for its insistence [*sic*] that politics and economics, in their most exact sense, deserve the attention of people who believe in the necessity for a severe spiritual askesis and the discipline and development of the soul' (pp.69-73). In the same number, a second book of Ludovici's, *Man: An Indictment* is separately reviewed. Ludovici's theme of 'The degeneracy, physical, intellectual and spiritual, of modern man, letting in the debilitating doctrines of feminism and egalitarian democracy' makes for the reviewer (who remains anonymous, but the writing, in both style and sentiment is very like Eliot's) 'an interesting and stimulating book, the fruit ... of shrewd observation of present-day social and cultural conditions'. Ludovici's 'rasping sauce that accompanies a wholesome dish' is an oblique reference to his proto-Nazi eugenical ideas about 'Weakly and half-witted children who in other days would have succumbed in infancy [and who] are now, thanks to the enormous advance in medical knowledge, preserved alive to become, in the majority of cases, a burden upon the healthy and efficient' [p.84].

types of contemporary political organisation', 'romanticism', and "humanism", or the question of education and civilization', draws his approval, particularly with the inclusion in the proceedings of 'persistent questions of religion'. According to him, 'such subjects, and such varied subjects, would hardly have engaged so much attention from men of letters of the previous generation, or even fifteen years ago'. With the journal (reflecting the decade of the 1930s itself) about to enter its most brazenly political phase, extended encapsulation is here necessary to demonstrate his developing sense of political and social accreditation. Three events have, in Eliot's view, caught the attention of (like-minded) writers in the last ten years, so distracting them from their usual calling:

the Russian revolution (which has also directed our attention to the East), the transformation of Italy (*which has directed our attention to our own forms of government*), and the condemnation of the *Action Française* by the Vatican. All of these events compel us to consider the problem of Liberty and Authority, both in politics and in the organisation of speculative thought. *Politics has become too serious a matter to be left to politicians.... Everything is in question ... [W]e must submit to the pressure of circumstances.... We have to adapt our minds to a new age ... [N]one of these problems is local.... [I]t is the same set of problems ... which is occupying the mind of all Europe. We can only hope that all this labour will make it possible for us [artists] to return more tranquilly to our own business*, such as writing a poem, or painting a picture (pp.385-387, my emphases).

His fixation on the emergence of Bolshevism and its adversary, Fascism, and the papal denunciation of the perniciously reactionary *l'Action française* (along with the excommunication of its ringleader, Charles Maurras) shows the extent of Eliot's engagement with marginal ideologies, while the passages italicized indicate his growing absorption with the logical next step: the extrapolation from the merely dogmatic to the practising-political.⁸⁰

With the June 1928 issue the 'monthly experiment' was abandoned, and *The Criterion* reverted to quarterly publication. Commercial considerations aside (and on this score, understandably, there is never a hint of circulation numbers), a journal which alters its form for a third time in under six years and sedulously restates its objectives suggests a publication still struggling to find its identity, oscillating as it was between literary review and political pamphlet. Somehow, despite their assured tone, Eliot's repetitive editorial testimonies come across as self-conscious interrogations

⁸⁰ For a stubborn defence of Maurras, even in the face of his papal excommunication and a storm of intellectual condemnation of him, see Eliot's own feature 'The *Action Française*, M. Maurras and Mr Ward' in *The Criterion* for March 1928.

meaninglessly rehearsed before an already converted and acquiescent readership, inversely affirming the propensities they avowedly deny. The journal's political-religious interface is made explicit at the same time as it is disarmingly cushioned by a claimed objectivity:

In the theory of politics, in the largest sense, *The Criterion* is interested ... [T]he general relations of civilized countries among each other should be examined; and the philosophies expressed or implicit in various tendencies, such as communism or fascism, are worthy of dispassionate examination. In religious controversies, again, *The Criterion* can take no side. It can only examine the ideas involved, and their implications, their consequences and their relations to the general problems of civilization; but at the point where intellectual analysis stops, and emotional conviction begins, our commission ends (p.291).

Is Eliot shamming, or more charitably, is his a genuine case of divided loyalty between irreconcilable objectives? If so, perhaps Eliot the idealistic man of letters was simply being too hard on Eliot the practising editor, especially when that projected 'tendency' which two and a half years before he had *hoped* would become the defining characteristic of the journal, seems to have come to pass:

What unites, we believe, the various writers, both in England and in foreign countries, who constitute what has vaguely been called 'the *Criterion* group', is not a common adhesion to a set of dogmatic principles, even of literary criticism, but a common interest in what we believe to be the most important matters of our time, which allows the widest variation in attitude and tendency. It is this, we believe, which distinguishes *The Criterion* from all other reviews (p.292).

Perhaps this is a journal, and an editor, whose errors lie simply in attempting too much. Subsidiary to those primary interests in politics and religion already mentioned and the 'common interest' of Conservatism which must colour all (I say 'subsidiary' because it draws explication only in the very last paragraph of this four-and-one-half pages editorial) is the *literary* function; *The Criterion* is, after all, subtitled 'A Literary Review'. Lest the much-desired category of free-thinking (and convertible) reader drawn to it for this last attribute should be repelled by what has gone before, the editorial tone lightens: 'Having written the foregoing paragraphs, we feel that this account may produce an impression of terrifying solemnity and heavy theory. Such is not at all our aim! *The Criterion* is certainly not a technical review ... [O]ne of the most important of our tasks is to keep the reader in contact with the best creative writing of our time - weighing the work of the oldest and of the youngest generations on the same scales' (p.293).

These cosmetic promulgations of political and critical non-alignment are perhaps

indicative of what was effectively a marketing problem; that is, the acknowledged bias of the journal attracted a mostly blimpish readership with already closed minds (those minds 'which turn to a literary review as they would glance at the picture-page or the social column of a daily paper - who miss nothing, and who understand nothing') when its editor (if not its original backers, like Viscountess Rothermere) sought to attract instead 'the generally civilized, and intelligent, and more or less educated person' who could be won over to the Conservative cause. Eliot's ongoing editorial challenge was consequently one of balancing readership expectations - how could the review pander to the former category of reader while enticing the latter?

The 'Commentary' to the next number, December 1928, under the caption 'Modernism in England' follows a familiar method. An apparent disquisition on the narrow theological controversy between Orthodoxy and modernity which had dogged the Catholic Church for nearly fifty years, and observations on the recent Cheltenham Congress of the Church of England become amplified in scope from the religious to the universal:

Disputes on ritual affect only those within the Church; but the question of Orthodoxy and Modernism affects everybody.... What we [in *The Criterion*] are concerned with is that Modernism [despite the capitalization, meant here as the general movement towards progressive liberal democracy, not the cultural movement of that subsequently-endowed, paradoxical name] ... is a mental blight which can afflict the whole of the intelligence of the time, whether within or without the Church.... [W]here you find muddy thinking you usually find that ... such a person is in essentials a Modernist (p.188).⁸¹

⁸¹ Apart from editorially demonstrating what remains of Eliot's *late 1920s* political timorousness and how 'the function of a political theory is to *permeate* society', rather than encourage rabid, partisan political alliances, this issue features his own review of five recent books treating the theories and practise of Italian Fascism under the heading 'The Literature of Fascism'. In this review there are, of course, the usual scapegraces, like universal suffrage ('with every vote added, the value of every vote diminishes' [p.281]), democracy ('any disparagement of "democracy" is nowadays well received by nearly every class of men' [p.287]), and Fabian socialism ('it is a matter of regret that England has no contemporary and indigenous school of political thought since Fabianism, and as an alternative to it' [p.290]). The review is interesting because it shows that a decade before his *The Idea of a Christian Society*, the charismatic element common to revealed religion and political popularism was engaging him; while believing that 'religious beliefs (including, of course, Atheism) are on a different plane' from politics, that distinction can become blurred: 'Some so-called religious beliefs are really political beliefs in disguise; but many political beliefs are substitutes for religious beliefs.... [T]he more a political creed usurps the place of religious creed, the more risk of its becoming merely a facade' (pp.282-283). The

Under the leader 'Commentary' for April 1929 entitled 'Thoughts on a General Election' the familiar Eliotic protest against universal suffrage is rehearsed: 'Everyone who cares for civilization must dread and deplore that waste of time, money, energy and illusion which is called a General Election. No country pays so heavily for this undesirable luxury as Britain'. Although writing 'All that can be predicted this year is the usual waste of time, money and energy', like most people, Eliot knew that the writing was on the wall for the five-year Conservative government of Stanley Baldwin, and that a second Labour government, under Ramsay MacDonald with his 'dreary sermons', was soon to regain power. The assumptions behind this editorial (addressed as it is to 'everyone who cares for civilization') yet again insinuates an audience receptive to the view that 'civilization' is abiding while participatory democracy is not, and that they are therefore separable.

Eliot proceeds to raise 'The Politics of Men of Letters' who are, in his view, licensed to interpose themselves in politics because they are 'the only men who do worry about its [politics'] principles'. (It is certain that those 'aging Fabians', Bernard Shaw and H.G.Wells, would have been askance at finding themselves linked with Wyndham Lewis in all 'inclin[ing] in the direction of some kind of fascism'.) Eliot wants to suggest that the overwhelming majority of writers are, like himself, becoming 'more and more sympathetic towards some kind of autocracy' (p.379). Certainly he was prescient in suggesting this authoritarian tendency deserved 'very serious consideration' and that it would 'become the instinctive attitude of thousands of unthinking people a few years hence', though not as he predicted through art - 'the writings of these authors and others' - but through messianic politics. Because of two modern trends: 'The extreme of democracy - which we have almost reached', and (to his mind) the diminished, even if equalitarian empowerment that goes with 'one fifty-thousandth part in choosing a [parliamentary] representative', he suggests that we may as well abandon the delusions of an imperfect democracy which anyway 'promises greater and greater interference with private liberty' and accept the no greater disadvantages of authoritarianism. This explains his low estimation of popularism in any form (even extending to the political mandate) and why he finds himself 'in agreement with the eminent men of letters mentioned, in wishing to see the strengthening of central authority, the establishment of continuity in central policy, and its liberation from the humbug of pretending to act upon public opinion' (pp. 379-380).

Perhaps reflecting the debates waged in recent issues between correspondents like J.S. Barnes and A.L. Rowse over the respective merits of fascism and communism,

corollary is not acknowledged, and small wonder; were it so, what would this say about the religious beliefs of Eliot himself and the legion of other Modernist converts to Orthodox Christianity?

Eliot's 'Commentary' in the October 1930 issue displays a general phlegm towards the hurly-burly of British parliamentary affairs. 'The summer of Parliament ended in public depression and apathy, and we look towards the autumn resumption with still less hopefulness.... [N]o one wants the present government in, and no one wants it out.... In short, the distinction of M.P. is not what it once was' (p.1). This editorial is a curious one indeed. While predictably, the malaise in politics is indicative of prevailing social decline ('The rot in Parliament is only a symptom of the rot without; and outside also mediocrity of mind and spirit is to be found conspicuous'), it seems to hint in a most abstracted way at two fascist commonplaces. Firstly, in discussing 'Foreign Affairs' he accents certain of what he calls 'the same old fallacies'. The first such fallacy is that 'the *absolute* difference between governments is not between good and bad simply, but between being governed by people of one's own race and language and being governed by people of an alien race and language: [that is, the fallacious belief that] the former is invariably better and a sovereign recipe for happiness'. A cognate fallacy, according to Eliot, is the notion that "self-government" or "responsible self-government" is the one true hall-mark of a high civilization' (p.2 - original emphasis). These refutations can be read as justifications for colonialism and for the policies of imperial expansion which were central to fascist theories of Darwinist nationalism. Furthermore, that widespread state of social decay and 'mediocrity of mind and spirit' can, it seems, be expunged only by higher collective ideals. What is needed is 'causes for which sacrifices can be made ... The pathetic desire for a cause, for something simple to believe in' (p.3). While he facetiously suggests higher taxes as one such forfeit, his use of the word 'sacrifice' echoes the transcendental tone of a prominent feature entitled 'Fascism', by the supporter and personal friend of *Il Duce*, J.S. Barnes, which had appeared in *The Criterion* eighteen months before:

The Fascist's own idealism is of quite another temper. He regards the perfect man as just the normal man, raised only to a higher level by faith - the normal man with a keen sense of realities and a mistrust of ideologies, the man with the old Roman family virtues, profoundly robust, full of healthy animal, combative spirits, but disciplined, loyal and fearless, hating war but ready, if need be, to undergo it and give his life that his ideals may live (April 1929, p.459).

The pungency of this editorial is rounded out by an article entitled 'The Standard of Living' which once more castigates modern social conditions. Eliot questions this 'unctious phrase ... Is it overcrowding in a small and unsanitary house, or overcrowding in a large and sanitary and cheerless workmen's dwellings? [*sic*] Is it shrimps for tea, or a gramophone or a wireless set?' For the Christian like Eliot, gratification of human material needs is never in itself enough: 'the true "standard of living" ... raises moral and spiritual, as well as economic questions'. The item therefore concludes with a

calumniation of leisured idleness which can be taken as a clue to the growing appeal of Fascism and the purgation of the bourgeoisie promised by it in the name of vitalism and national renewal:

As for the 'standard of living' of the more affluent class, it seems at present to involve long week-ends, and golf, tennis, and motoring on Sunday. The Roman empire left behind it at least a few ruined temples, aqueducts, and walls; one is sometimes inclined to wonder whether the British will leave, for the future archaeologist, anything better than the traces of innumerable golf-courses, and a number of corroded fowling-pieces, scattered like primitive arrow-heads, over the desolate wastes of Scottish moors (pp.3-4).

With the January 1931 issue, Eliot began to relegate his 'Commentary' to a subordinate place within the miscellany of feature articles. (And as if to compensate for their voluntary displacement and to emphasize his authorship, they were henceforth to bear the initials 'T.S.E'.) These embedded editorial contributions, divested of topic headings, became rather like gratuitous 'stream of consciousness' reactionary outpourings, discursive in extent, vitriolic in tone, in their survey of the contemporary political and social scene. Familiar 'aunt sallys' include "popular education", the "framework of democracy", the current 'Socialist [Labour] Party', and 'that most costly of sports - the Sport of Democrats - the General Election'. This being the height of the Great Depression, the political emphasis necessarily being placed on economic regeneration while ethical and spiritual values continue to languish comes in for the usual tirade; this is

a theory of politics ... which is indeed, by democratic blessing, the common property of every common subject and citizen; the view that politics has nothing whatever to do with private morals, and that national prosperity and the greatest happiness of the greatest number depend entirely upon the difference between good and bad economic theories.... Private morals are not only private, but wholly negative.... Unless popular education is also moral education, it is merely putting firearms into the hands of children. For education in History (and Political Economy) is vain, unless it teaches us to extract moral and spiritual values from History (pp.308-309).

Yet Eliot, following Pound, cannot desist from repudiating democratic assumptions on this 'vain' level of history and economics presumably because they see in the bleak state of both spheres the way to strike at democracy's soft underbelly. Discreditation is the first step: he cites modern Western democracy as offering the illusion of an ideological spectrum, that is, freedom of political choice, when in fact 'all parties are exactly of the same practice in regard to everything that matters; they must however differ completely on a number of showy points that don't matter'. As to

economics, his reading of the numerous productions of Major Douglas and his disciples' confirms him in the suspicion that conventional economic practice is all wrong ... [P]olitical Economy boasts itself as a science as Physics is a science ... [I]n fact Economics *is* a science, in the humane sense; but it will never take its due place until it recognizes the superior "scientific" authority of Ethics' (pp.309 & 311).⁸²

Eliot finds agreement with a recent *Adelphi* essay of John Middleton Murry (later to join him in the Christian 'discussion' group, the Moot), saying that "the need of a new asceticism is upon us" ... so that the few are left *redeeming the time, because the days are evil*, yet perpetually pestered with Income Tax Applications' (p.313 - original emphasis). These complaints against modernity are by now an Eliotic reflex; more compelling are the veiled countermeasures he advances for them. If, under democracy, 'all parties are exactly of the same practice' (and 'conventional economic practice is all wrong') then some sort of *non-democratic* alternative, one imprinted with Murry's 'new asceticism', is desiderated.⁸³ Eliot is plain-spoken in his contention that 'the new asceticism should not only be practiced by the few, *but imposed upon the many* ... [A]n impulse capable of disciplining the individual ... is needed.... [T]he asceticism must first, certainly, be practiced by the few, and it must be definite enough to be explained to, *and ultimately imposed upon, the many; imposed in the name of something in which they must be made to believe*' (pp. 313-314 - my emphases).⁸⁴

⁸² In restating Douglassian Social Credit tenets like these, Eliot aligns himself with Shelley, whom he habitually reviled. Shelley was actually saying much the same in his 'A Defence of Poetry' more than a century before (1821, published 1840): 'We have more moral, political and historical wisdom, than we know how to reduce into practice; we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies'.

⁸³ By the time of his 'Commentary' to the July 1931 issue he was openly declaring that 'the old contrast between Capitalism and Socialism is hardly going to suffice for the next forty years.... Certainly, there are many people, and there will be more, who are seeking some alternative to both.... And [already] there are a great many hungry sheep who look up, and down, and all around them' (pp.714-715).

⁸⁴ Eliot's encysted 'Commentary' to the following number for April 1931 roves in similar vein for more than nine pages: 'The social and political situation in England is such that we now hear from the most orthodox editorial pulpits in the country that something must be done ... [T]he present system not only does not work well now but probably will never work well again' (p.481). As he was soon to do in *After Strange Gods*, he commends the agrarian tradition (and *ipso facto*, the slave-economy) of the American South expressed in Allen Tate's and others' recently-published *I'll Take My Stand* because 'The old Southern society, with all its defects, vices and limitations, was still in its way a spiritual entity; and now the organization of society is wholly materialistic.... Unrestrained industrialism ... destroys the upper classes first' (p.484-485). Other modern bugaboos include 'Graduate Schools of Business Administration

Three issues later, in the October 1931 number, Eliot provides a 'Commentary' of no less than eight pages, provoked by his reading 'two small books', *An Introduction to Politics*, by Harold J. Laski ('an exponent of moderate Socialism'), and *Ich Dien: The Tory Path*, by the Conservative M.P., Lord Lymington. Eliot rejects Laski's identification of economic function as the prime determinant of the 'character' of the modern state, that is, 'that the character of politics is a function of economics', before falling upon Laski's tenet that 'no state will realize the end for which it exists unless it is a democracy based upon universal suffrage ... [and] the exercise of civic rights'. Eliot's old *tic* over the franchise triggers his iconoclastic response: 'For what end *does* the state exist? And why should *not* race, creed, birth and property, any one or more of them, be a desirable barrier [to suffrage]? And what are *civic rights*?' (p.66 - original emphases). But it is Laski's latitudinarian 'bombshell against theocracy ... flung from a window of the London School of Economics' that ' "Historical research has shattered all [political] systems which claim to operate under theological sanctions" ' and his 'unctuous' claim that ' "the right to education is ... fundamental to citizenship" ' which leads to his book being dismissed by *The Criterion's* editor for being 'as useful as a catalogue of spare parts for a motor car which is no longer manufactured' (p.68). The simile here would seem to suggest that the restated liberal humanism in what Eliot calls Laski's 'old-fashioned American conception of Democracy' has by late 1931 become outdated and irrelevant.

Turning to *Ich Dien: The Tory Path*, Eliot is clearly disappointed by Lord Lymington's moderacy, particularly towards the tenet, central in Eliot's mind, of the centrality of the Church in Conservative thinking. As he puts it: 'Unless Toryism maintains a definite and uncompromising theory of Church and State, Toryism is merely a fasces of expedients' (p.69).⁸⁵ What makes these and the comments on Laski's book relevant is their originator's obvious impatience with what are, for him, outworn

on the American model [offering] something for everybody except those who want an education', 'diplomas from the London School of Economics' (elsewhere he refers to 'Mensheviks of the London School of Economics pattern'), and 'the over and badly-educated middle and upper classes' (pp.486-487).

⁸⁵ In a defensive review of the socialist A.L. Rowse's book *Politics and the Younger Generation* in the January 1932 issue, the reviewer, Charles Smyth offers his definition of (and distinction between) Toryism and Conservatism which may help explain their widespread 1930s appeal: 'Toryism, with its stern and simple loyalties - Church and King, the Royal Supremacy, the National Establishment, passive obedience, authority as divinely ordered, with institutional religion and mutual charity - is barely recognisable in modern Conservatism, which is essentially humanitarian and secular and materialistic, begotten of the public schools upon the Industrial Revolution. Conservatism is indeed constructive, but its activities are primarily defensive: it stands to the defence of property and rank and order' (p.312).

models of flabby middle-ground politics conventionally expressed in democracy (or even its Conservative subset) that are so conspicuously ill-equipped for the overwrought modern scene. This he makes abundantly clear; it is

not a small matter, or a [conventionally political] debating point. Lord Lymington, like Mr Laski, wants a state in which government shall be designed for the happiness of the governed; but as alternatives to [Russian] Communism [that 'repugnant philosophy'], both outlines seem to me dreadfully incapable of arousing enthusiasm.... And we can only oppose it with another [political philosophy] which shall be correspondingly dear to us ... [T]he Bolsheviks at any rate believe in something which has what is equivalent for them to a supernatural sanction; and it is only with a genuine supernatural sanction that we can oppose it (pp.70-71).

The paranormal opposition to communism Eliot is here invoking can purport to be an invigorated Toryism; particularly a Toryism which has rediscovered its 'supernatural sanction' through reintegration with its oldest ally, the Church. This new Tory incarnation might even go so far as to feature 'not only a doctrine of the relation of the temporal and spiritual in matters of Church and State ... but even a religious foundation for the whole of its political philosophy'. These are its essentials because 'Nothing less can engage enough respect to be a worthy adversary for Communism'.⁸⁶ But I say 'purport' above because Eliot's characteristic of 'supernaturalism' (and such temporal misuse ought to have been blasphemous to a practising Christian) already had, by the early 1930s, another ideological claimant. Surely both term and concept were cipherably transposable to that emergent, more magnetic political strain than any lacklustre variant of representative government; a strain which had already declared its opposition to the spread of communism, was promising that imposition of national 'asceticism' Eliot had been crying out for nine months before, and which was rapidly winning popular support across Central and Southern Europe?

Finally, this 'Commentary' ends with the Tory's commendation of idyllic agrarianism; this superannuated concept preoccupied Eliot throughout his life.⁸⁷ Lord

⁸⁶ This new 'Toryism' contrasts with that enervated "Conservatism" which he relegates for having 'been overrun first by deserters from Whiggism and later by business men' (p.71).

⁸⁷ Three years later, in a lengthy 'Commentary' on the work of the National Trust dated October 1934, he wrote 'an age and a society which is sure of itself - not self-consciously cocksure - will neither destroy too much nor preserve too much.... [by instituting] a very different economic basis, and a *healthy, settled agriculture, with a proper balance between town and country life*' (p.89 - my emphasis). While these attitudes spring from the anti-modern, mawkish Eliot, in the light of present-day ecological concerns they can perhaps be more charitably interpreted as Eliot the proto-conservator; among similar observations

Lymington's solicitousness about rural Britain is astray because he commends its retention for merely 'economic' or 'military' reasons when, for Eliot, the land has a paramount mystical-social dimension, hence: 'agriculture is the foundation for the Good Life in any society ... [O]nly in a primarily agricultural society, in which people have local attachments to their small domains and small communities, and remain, generation after generation, in the same place, is genuine patriotism possible'. This is an impulse, we are to note, which is at a far remove from 'the artificial patriotism of the press, of political combinations and unnatural frontiers and the League of Nations' (p.72). But if this is a 'patriotism' unsullied by waning early 1930s internationalism, and must not acquiesce in the imposition of 'unnatural frontiers' in defiance of ethnic identity, language, and culture, then it is certain to be transmuted into rampant nationalism and end up in the jingoistic clutches of both the popular press and 'political combinations'. Could Eliot have been unaware that he was reinscribing patriotism in terms indistinguishable from those being constantly extolled in the Nazi tabloid, the *Volkischer Beobachter*?

Eliot's 'Commentary' to the April 1932 issue reflects (like the one preceding it) his concern with topical economic affairs before the simplistically political, although his claimed interest lies more with general socio-economic outcomes than modern economic hypotheses which he dismisses as the contemporary 'mixture, which may easily be a muddle, of economic theory, humanitarian enthusiasm, and religious fervour'. This shift in focus arises in his conflation of the current economic depression and a perception of universal moral and social malaise. (Or as one *Criterion* contributor at this time put it 'The endemic unemployment of our times is clear proof of maladjustment in the social machine'.) For Eliot, as always, modernity is a failure, not least in its economic functionings: 'The present system does not work properly, and more and more people are inclined to believe both that it never did and that it never will; and it is obviously neither scientific nor religious. It is imperfectly adapted to every purpose except that of making money; and even for money-making it does not work very well ... It is well adapted to speculation and usury ... and it rewards well those who can cozen and corrupt the crowd' (p.467). His desperate casting about for remedies draws plaudits even for Marx, who is lauded for 'his analysis so profound, that it must be very difficult for anyone who reads him without prejudice on the one hand, or without any definite religious faith on the other, to avoid accepting his conclusions', and of thus becoming a convert to the pseudo-religion of socialist economics and revolutionary idealism.

expressed elsewhere consider his remark in *The Idea of a Christian Society*: 'it would be as well for us to face the permanent conditions upon which God allows us to live upon this planet' (pp.61-62).

Again, what Eliot admires despite himself is the 'religious fervour' he finds in monolithic political systems, though it was surely too literal an attribution, suggesting he had never encountered Lenin's *On Religion*, to write of Soviet Communism that 'it is exactly in its religious development that Communism seems to collapse and to become something both ludicrous and repulsive' (p.468). This defiled variety of 'religious' ardour was the driving agent in the romantic nationalism which was a hallmark of the 1930s totalitarian regimes, and, like so many others he is simultaneously attracted and repulsed by it: 'The mystical belief in herd-feeling ... is one of the most disquieting superstitions of the day.... [T]o the Christian it must appear a travesty of all that in which he believes'. And he presages the images of totalitarian soldiery that were soon to dominate the Gaumont-British and Pathe newsreels, with the observation, like that of J.S.Barnes, that 'The craving for some passionate *conviction*, and for a living organic society, assumes odd and often extremely dangerous forms. Man must have something to which he is ready to sacrifice himself' (p.470 - original emphasis). Eliot himself knew those cravings, and as the decade unfolded he (and his contributors) flirted increasingly with dangerous 'forms' of reanimated society.

Eliot's 'Commentary' to the October 1932 issue is worth examination for its recapitulation of neoclassicism with its emphasis on static traditions and the impossibility of incrementation in the arts or, for that matter, human nature. In words that sound very (T.E.) Hulmean, he writes

One of the consequences, as it seems to me, of our failure to grasp the proper relation of the Eternal and the Transient, is our *over-estimation of the importance of our own time*. This is natural to an age which ... is still imbued with the doctrine of progress.... The notion that a past age or civilization might be great in itself, precious in the eye of God, because it succeeded in adjusting the delicate relation of the Eternal and the Transient, is completely alien to us. No age has been more ego-centric, so to speak, than our own ... Thus we take ourselves, and our transient affairs, too seriously (p.75 - original emphasis).

The terms used here are not clearly defined. By 'Transient', Eliot connotes 'the practical activit[ies] [of] every living generation', and includes the current economic crisis, whereas the 'Eternal' vaguely involves 'the supernatural and the eternal'. And because constituent elements like the nature of humankind are fixed, modern progress is an illusion; what developments we deem to be 'progress', like 'the communist Utopia', turn out to be instances of superficial change. While Eliot is prepared to allow the abstraction that humanity 'can improve both its material well-being and its spiritual capacities' and that it 'must also have a conception of a perfect society attainable on earth' we are not allowed to forget 'the inadequacy of these ambitions and ideals'. This is because the basest of those elements tenuously participating in the 'Eternal' is a

species tainted by Original Sin. Having fretted, two issues previously, over the verisimilitude of Marxist economic theory and its charismatic potential to spread westwards from its Russian powerbase, Eliot has remembered an old ally (Hulme) and an even older concept with which to counter that theory. Thus, not for the first or last time, he falls back on Christian eschatology to whittle away at modern Enlightenment-inspired models of 'Transient' social reconstitution like Marxist Socialism: 'We must say that man, however he is improved by social and economic reorganization, by eugenics, and by any other external means possible to the science of intellect, will still be only the *natural* man, at an infinite remove from perfection'.⁸⁸

Similarly, in the sphere of art, Eliot contends 'there can be no art *greater* than the art which has already been created: there will only be different ... combinations of the eternal and the changing in the forms of art.... [M]en individually can never attain anything higher than has been already attained among the Saints' (p.78 - original emphases). When Eliot writes 'a just perception of the permanent relations of the Enduring and the Changing should ... make us realize our own time in better proportion to times past and times to come ... [I]t should help us to think better of our time, as not isolated or unique, and remind us that fundamentally our individual problems and duties are the same as they have been for others at any time' (pp.78-79), his object is to quell mounting revolutionary communist ardour by cool exposition, adopting Marx's own key method of historical interpretation. The difference is that while Marx's dialectical materialism was and still is attunable to modern outcomes, like Yeats's pessimistic conception of historical 'circularity', Eliot's equally specious historical *linearity* displays an ignorance of the wayward but ultimately meliorative peculiarities of modern history and of twentieth-century conditions particularly. The time, and its 'problems and duties', incrementally greater than those of any age before it, were never more definitively 'isolated' and 'unique'.

While subscribing to the West's early 1930s communist phobia, Eliot's editorials at this time reveal an attraction to the doctrine despite its avowed antagonism to religious belief already manifest in the Soviet bullying of the Russian Church, the last citadel, in fact, of archetypal Christian Orthodoxy. This is explained by Eliot's general fascination with charismatic politics, that is, totalitarianism with its powerfully mythical element, and the niche that the process of national consciousness-raising, in this case socialist realism, might offer the creative writer. In his 'Commentary' for January 1933, Eliot, writing from America, discusses his recent perusal of 'two books which discuss the

⁸⁸ Observe Eliot's tribute to Hulme in his essay 'Second Thoughts About Humanism' of 1929: 'It is to the immense credit of Hulme that he found out for himself that there is an *absolute* to which Man can *never* attain' (*Selected Essays*, p.490 - original emphases).

relation of literature to social affairs': Leon Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* and the Marxist V.F. Calverton's *The Liberation of American Literature*. These texts prompt him to write revealingly how 'There are obvious inducements, besides that - never wholly absent - of simple conversion, to entice the man of letters into social and political theory which he then employs to revive his sinking fires and rehabilitate his profession' (p.244).⁸⁹ Eliot's grudging acknowledgement of the socialist-realist designs underlying and inspiring Soviet literature unwittingly affirms Marx's cultural theories while betraying the same intertwined political and literary enterprise that he indulged behind the facade of *The Criterion* for so long.⁹⁰

In his 'Commentary' for July 1933, Eliot is predictably goaded by an editorial statement in an American sister literary periodical, *The Symposium*, which he quotes, *inter alia*, as follows: 'The moral and spiritual goods should not be the direct concern of a politico-economic party at the present time' (p.642). Perhaps I overuse the adverb 'predictably', but all of Eliot's political and social criticism has at its core a desire for the reintegration of the moral and spiritual dimension into workaday political and economic affairs, or what he himself called 'the relation of morals [of which the Church must remain the sole custodian] and politics'. Here, he distinguishes between two types of 'reformer or revolutionist: the coming type of Liberal Reformer, which *The Symposium* strikes me as prefiguring, and the Reactionary, who at this point feels a stronger sympathy with the communist' (p.643).

This editorial includes the stock Conservative rail against the modern inversion in the social structure: 'We are [now] taught ... to worship the nation first, the district second, and the local community third, and the family last; whereas we are only capable

⁸⁹ Trotsky: 'Marxism alone can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period of history'; Calverton: 'The revolutionary proletarian critic does not aim to underestimate literary craftsmanship. What he contends is simply that literary craftsmanship is not enough. The craftsmanship must be utilized to create objects of revolutionary meaning' (as quoted, p.247).

⁹⁰ This communism-regarding trend continues in the next issue for April 1933, where his 'Commentary' concludes: 'I would even say that, as it is the faith of the day, there are only a small number of people living who have achieved the right *not* to be communists. My only objection to it is the same as my objection to the cult of the Golden Calf. It is better to worship a golden calf than to worship nothing; but that, after all, is not, in the circumstances, an adequate excuse. My objection is that it just happens to be mistaken' (p.473 - original emphasis). So communist and alternative manifestations of totalitarianism are entitled to estimation because of their pseudo-religious element of *fervour*; their legitimacy is apparently a secondary consideration. If the Soviet Communist ideology had been other than simply 'mistaken' (the ways of its errors are not explained), might the excesses of Stalinism have been, to Eliot's way of thinking, justified?

of understanding the nation through its relation to the family'. This leads to 'A social system which has no explicit moral foundation, [thereby becoming one] in which the Church, rather than the brothels, is tolerated, [and] in which ownership of land, except for speculative purposes, is not encouraged'. Eliot can never allow of a schema entirely bereft of morality, and once again, the modern Conservative must be prepared to compromise where necessary because 'A [totalitarian, or other] system based on moral presuppositions of which we disapprove may turn the individual into the kind of person whom we dislike, but he will still be a person who feels that he has a reason for existing; [whereas] the result of a system which has no moral presuppositions may be nothing better than decay' (p.645).

This same 'Commentary' is instructive because of its concluding remarks. Even the Great Depression, then at its nadir, could not, to Eliot's way of thinking, justify a narrowly politico-economic resolution. Contra *The Symposium*, he calls for a parallel and complementary renovation in social ethics so that 'The system which the intelligent economist discovers or invents must immediately be related to a moral system.... [I]t is ultimately the moralists and philosophers who must supply the foundations of statesmanship ... We are constantly being told that the economic problem cannot wait. It is equally true that the moral and spiritual problems cannot wait: they have already waited far too long' (p.647). While Eliot pairs 'morality' and 'spirituality' as overdue restoratives in the social order, his dominant concern lies with the latter: that is, with the widespread return to piety. But any effective reintroduction of 'morality' to the social order, any real implementation of his argument for 'the priority of ethics over politics' at a time of universal economic destitution would surely have demanded some form of Socialist redistribution of wealth. This sort of measure he nowhere advocates.

Eliot's 'Commentary' for October 1933 is monopolized by an obituary to his late Harvard teacher, Irving Babbitt, and perhaps for that reason contains familiar galls against universal and utilitarian education ('We insist upon "educating" too many people; and Heaven knows what for.... [I]n most schools Greek, cannot, I understand, be learnt at all') and of course, humanism ('another "humanism", a damnable infringement of patent ... has already been put upon the market in America by some liberal "ministers" '). And as he had observed in the series of lectures comprising *After Strange Gods* some months earlier, it was for him a matter of deep regret that 'Babbitt's attitude towards Christianity remained, in spite of his sometimes deceptive references to "religion", definitely obdurate' (pp.117-119).⁹¹

⁹¹ Not surprisingly, Babbitt's 'most important single book is *Democracy and Leadership*'. Here, Babbitt (without doubt Eliot's most influential mentor) wrote in 1924 that 'The results of the material success and spiritual failure of the modern movement are before us. It is becoming obvious to every one that the

The various issues of *The Criterion* at this time are interesting for the ways in which they both lead and reflect the prevailing early/mid 1930s vacillation towards communism, impelled as this was by the Great Depression. Eliot's 'Commentary' for January 1934 refers to 'the flood of books on the subject' and goes on to review three of them, commending, in particular, A.J. Penty's *Communism and the Alternative*, noting with approval the assertion (and quoting Penty's own words) that

Christianity, because it takes its stand on the spiritual nature of man, is the only principle capable of challenging the root assumptions of materialist Communism.... In consequence it will not be until those who are opposed to Communism take their stand as unequivocally upon the principles of Christianity as Communists do upon those of materialism that a force will be set in motion capable of successfully challenging it and restoring the lost equilibrium between the spiritual and material sides of life (p.276).

From this religio-political matrix emerges the type whom Eliot calls 'the Christian social philosopher', citing writers like de Maistre, Coleridge, and Newman as offering 'political inspiration'.⁹² On the contemporary scene, there are familiar figures like the Reverend V.A. Demant (whose 'important book' *God Man and Society* he had recently commended in *After Strange Gods*), and of course, the more militant Christopher Dawson. Eliot approves of conservative Christian thinkers like these because of their capacity for what he calls the 'dissociation of ideas', whereby the 'Christian social philosopher of our time ... [M]ust be able to consider the ideas of class, of property, of nationality not according to current or local prejudices, but according to permanent principles' (p.276). The inference appears to be that an Orthodox Christianity bent on secular intervention must remain imperturbably focused on Conservative 'principles' and not be drawn into the prevailing milieu of social destitution resulting from the economic depression for fear of entering the trap of materialism and becoming another 'mere' social agency like the Salvation Army. The Church's calling is the salvation of souls, not the filling of bellies, or the gratification of corporal needs as promised by materialistic political systems like communism. Demant (in his own words) attempts to

power of Occidental man has run very much ahead of his wisdom' (p.143). Further on, Babbitt writes 'With the progressive weakening of traditional standards, the inability of the humanitarian to supply any adequate substitute is becoming apparent. The whole of the Occident seems to be at an *impasse*. The mere rationalist and the mere emotionalist are about equally bankrupt. It may be that our only hope is a return to the truths of the inner life' (p.236).

⁹² For Newman, the spirit of Liberalism was 'characteristic of the destined Antichrist', no less. To his mind [a] 'spirit of lawlessness came in with the Reformation, and Liberalism is its offspring' (*Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, p.174).

justify this Christian indifference to playing any subsidiary and socially supportive role in aiding that upstart and illegitimate modern entity, the 'nation':

to place the redemptive work of the Christian Faith in social affairs in its proper setting, it is necessary to have clearly in mind at the outset that the consciousness of 'the nation' as *the* social unit is a very recent and contingent experience. It belongs to a limited historical period and is bound up with certain specific happenings, theories of society and attitudes to life as a whole. It is therefore not an inevitable or essential aspect of men's social consciousness (p.277 - original emphasis).

If the civil sanction of the modern nation-state can be eroded, the Orthodox Church can place itself beyond secular stewardship, answerable, as per its age-old proclamation, only to God. Yet it can continue to have it both ways: it can enjoy an untrammelled liberty to intervene on whatever temporal level it chooses (determining the nature of its 'redemptive work' for itself), without being bound to a corresponding obligation to mitigate in the practical, social sphere.⁹³

The 'Commentary' for July 1934 is relevant, not so much for its routine Eliotic castigation of universal education as for the way it discloses his continuing mesmerism by the long-discredited *l'Action française* and their extremist solutions for reconciling Church and State. Reviewing Sir Charles Petrie's 'brisk and readable book' *Monarchy*, he finds it lacking over the 'problem of Church and State', whereas it 'is the distinction of *l'Action française* to have recognized the capital importance of this question'. The conservative Church would much prefer to contract with its familiar accomplice, the monarch, than the modern abomination of the multifarious nation-state and it would stand to gain accordingly from any monarchical recapture of absolute authority, improbable as such a twentieth-century retrogression must have seemed, even to Eliot. Nevertheless, he maintains the proposition that 'the author of *Monarchy* might have experimented with new ideas, such as vesting the ownership of land and of the materials of production in the Crown, instead of that questionable proprietor, the nation.

⁹³ This matter of spiritual ministration over material needs, prompted by the rise of economically reforming party politics, especially communism, preoccupied Christian conservatives and the Catholic Church long after the Great Depression and even the Second World War had passed. See, for example, *God, Man and the Universe: A Christian Answer to Modern Materialism*, edited by Jacques de Bivort de la Saudee, part XV: 'Dialectical Materialism: The Philosophy of the Proletariat' (1954). And in his editorial to the succeeding issue of *The Criterion* (April 1934) Eliot maintains the theme: 'Our occupation with immediate social, political and economic issues to-day is a necessity, but a regrettable one ... To surrender individual judgement to a Church is a hard thing; to surrender individual responsibility to a party is, for many men, a pleasant stimulant and sedative.... What ultimately matters is the salvation of the individual soul' (pp. 452-454).

He might further have shown how a devotion to the Throne ... may act as a check and balance upon devotion to the party, the party leader, or the State' (pp. 628-630).

The January 1935 'Commentary' is based around an obituary to A.R. Orage, late editor of the seminal Modernist weekly, *The New Age*, a precise chronological as well as ideological forerunner of *The Criterion*, which had appeared between 1907 and 1922. Orage's memory is esteemed by Eliot because his critical function was the next best thing to that dwindling line of morally aware, creative writer whose imminent demise he had lamented in *After Strange Gods*; Orage constituted 'that necessary and rare person, the moralist in [literary] criticism ... the critic who perceives the morals of literature' (p. 261 - original emphasis).⁹⁴ But, according to Eliot, Orage was noteworthy also because in him the schism between the spiritual and the temporal - the duality of the incorporeal and the materialistic - was reconciled; thus 'He [Orage] saw that any real change for the better meant a spiritual revolution; and he saw that no spiritual revolution was of any use unless you had a practical economic scheme'. For once, Eliot comprehends the fundamental distinction between bifurcatory human impulses and the frustrations of would-be temporal reformers when he enlarges on the 'the very difficult problem of the *spiritual* and the *temporal*, the problem of which the problem of Church and State is a derivative'. In this modern conundrum, pitfalls await socio-political cum economic reformer and Orthodox Churchman alike. In the case of the former, 'The danger, for those who start from the temporal end, is *Utopianism*; settle the problem of distribution - of wheat, coffee, aspirin or wireless sets - and all the problems of evil will disappear'. For the latter, starting from the spiritual end, it is '*Indifferentism*; neglect the affairs of the world and save as many souls out of the wreckage as possible' (p. 262 - original emphases). Deferring to Orage's relative radicalism and 'the kind of economic changes which he wished to see brought about', Eliot himself seems philosophical towards economic revolution, though he holds reservations over the probability of such reforms being 'side-tracked, manipulated, exploited and degraded ... [because] [A]t some point human nature, unchanged in its fundamental passions and weaknesses, will be handling the controls'. Reforming politics seem in fact to have caught him up, even if moderacy remains his watchword, and he reminds us that 'The difficult effort is ... to expect neither too much nor too little of the changes which it is possible to operate

⁹⁴ Perhaps Orage's conservative tendencies also had something to do with Eliot's validation. Orage, another touched by Hulme's anti-Romanticism and anti-humanism, expressed in 1912 the hope that George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells might 'both live long enough to see themselves derided and their accursed [Socialist] doctrines numbered among the fads of the early twentieth century'. (See Wallace Martin: *The New Age under Orage* [1967], Chapter XII 'A Conservative Philosophy'.)

directly upon society' (pp. 263-264).⁹⁵

A report in *The Times* newspaper of the discovery of a 'lost' tribe in the jungle depths of Papua, living the life of the 'noble savage' hitherto untainted by European contact, furnishes Eliot, in his 'Commentary' for October 1935, with the cue once more to derogate Western civilization. He considers it a 'remarkable thing' that *The Times's* leader, its readership comprising the 'twopenny public', should express late-colonial apprehension over the likely harm this 'new race of possibly 100,000 souls ... will suffer from [contact with Western] civilization'. While this indicates in part 'an increased sense of responsibility towards inferior races', at issue is what he interprets as 'a lack of confidence in our civilization which is widespread and which must be pretty recent in history' (p. 66). Why, he asks, should we be concerned to prevent the 'disintegrating interference' of our civilization being visited upon 'primitive' races while settling for the inevitability of its corruption at home? 'If', he goes on, 'we are so helpless in the hands of our "civilization" that we admit our inability to prevent it from ruining Papuans, what hope have we of saving ourselves[?]' Admitting that he is a 'defeatist', he rhetorically asks '[U]ntil we set in order our own crazy economic and financial systems, to say nothing of our philosophy of life, can we be sure our helping hands to the barbarian and the savage will be any more desirable than the embrace of the leper?' (pp. 67-68).

With fascist territorial aggression already a matter of record (something, in the case of Abyssinia, Eliot for one did nothing at all to denounce when writing soullessly in his editorial for October 1935 that 'changes should be made in Abyssinia which will both raise the social conditions of the country and recognize those of the commercial and economic claims of Italy' [p.67]), the 1930s' steady slide towards war is reflected in the July 1936 'Commentary'. Here, Eliot avows that 'there would seem to be no subject today on which more words can easily be expended to less purpose, than to the ethics of War and Peace'. He rebuffs 'those who maintain that no war can be just' and leaves mootable the suspicion that he regards the imminent war as the rightful wages of sin for a fallen humankind, the fulfilment, perhaps, of the wrath of God, when he writes how 'economic causes [of war] are the most accessible and the most amenable; even though

⁹⁵ This new trend is maintained in the succeeding issue for April 1935, where, in his 'Commentary' Eliot writes, 'We agree that the present economic system is not very satisfactory, and that it works in such a way as frequently to offend our feelings of humanity and our notions of justice ... [A]nd that some drastic alteration will be necessary if life is to be made even tolerable.... [A]ny scheme which looks as if it might work better than the present one has to be seriously considered.... [I]f a scheme commends itself to us on the whole, we are willing to take risks for the sake of ending an intolerable situation' (p. 431 - my emphases).

they are only abstractions from the general stupidity and sinfulness of mankind'.⁹⁶ And is he expressing circumlocutory sympathy with Germany by alluding to punitive settlements of international justice like the Treaty of Versailles when he writes 'If we gave enough thought and effort to the institution of justice during the condition of "peace", we might not need to exercise our consciences so violently in anticipation of war' (pp.664-665)? Further on, in reviewing H.R.G. Greaves's *Reactionary England*, a book charting the 1930s lurch towards the political Right (and bearing the Socialist assent of Harold Laski and Clement Attlee), Eliot traces the phenomenon to sources 'far more profound than any mere machinations of consciously designing [sectarian] interests could make it'. His own explanation for the widespread turn towards reaction is that it is 'a symptom of the desolation of secularism, of that loss of vitality, through the lack of replenishment from spiritual sources, which we have witnessed elsewhere, and which becomes ready for the artificial stimulants of nationalism and class' (p. 668). This ready-to-hand interpretation is one more illustration of familiar scapegoats being tailored to fit the full range of modern maladies: just a few issues ago secularism and the same 'lack of replenishment from spiritual sources' were being held to blame for the spectacular rise of Soviet Communism.

The dominant topic in Eliot's 'Commentary' for January 1937 is the Spanish Civil War and the polarisation in political opinion, at home and abroad, which has been its result. Eliot's concern 'for us, as individuals in this country' is that fanaticism of the Right or the Left might upset 'the precarious balance of ideas in our heads' (p. 289). His low estimation of the democratic process doubtless explains his unwillingness to condemn the Nationalists' military insurrection against the popularly-elected Spanish government. Even after seven well-documented months of Iberian conflict he remains detached: 'so long as we are not compelled in our own interest to take sides, I do not see why we should do so on insufficient knowledge: and even any eventual partisanship should be held with reservations, humility and misgiving' (p.290). More notably, perhaps, after having pontificated so much over years past on the matter of morals and politics, his observations on the war are ethically vapid; for an explanation, we need only recall which faction the Spanish Church supported, though he is not without

⁹⁶ In the succeeding issue for October 1936 he seems, on the surface, less ambiguous in his reminder that 'It is certainly our obligation to do everything we can to make peace better worth preserving for *all* members of society' (pp. 66-67 - original emphasis). But he is well aware of the ideologies in contention behind the already four months old Spanish Civil War, so that when he writes 'the real issue of our time is not between those who believe in recourse to war and those who do not ... The real issue is between the secularists - whatever political or moral philosophy they support - and the anti-secularists', we know whose side he is on (p. 68).

misgivings at the prospect of a victory of the Right, for fear that this will see, even in Spain, 'the victory of a secular Right, not of a spiritual Right'. This is why those like himself 'who have at heart the interests of Christianity in the long run ... have especial reason' for suspending political and moral judgement alike (p. 290).

The 'Commentary' to the next number for April 1937 finds Eliot once more commending the late A. R. Orage, this time over the 'shock of contemporaneity' he finds on re-reading Orage's 1912 slating of the Women's Suffrage Movement. (Orage was once arrested for obstructing the Police trying to keep order at a suffrage demonstration.) Presumably the greater part of even *The Criterion's* readership would have baulked at being told that 'Orage's remarks on Women's Suffrage in 1912 are as well worth reading after twenty-five years as they were at the time'. For Eliot, the reactionary impediment to female enfranchisement merits exhumation because of its connectedness with a contemporary problem - the decline of the birth-rate, following, as to his mind it does, 'from the change in the position of women' (p. 470). His greatest concern is not with the consequences of a slowing population for the body politic (though reflecting the mood of the times, 'the physical inferiority of applicants for the army' does not go unremarked) but specifically for the declining ranks of the 'professional and clerical classes', and for the clergy. Once again, the 'deepest causes are economic', and 'niggardly' family benefit-type welfare state inducements will not arrest the decline. For him, the revival of a stable agricultural economy and the 'release from penury [of] what may be called the intellectual classes' remain the priorities. As for any check among the proliferating masses, he doubtless saw this as a not unwelcome boon of modernity.

This 'Commentary' concludes with a brief observation on the Right-Left pamphleteering warfare being conducted between 'every intellectual ... on the subject of Peace'; in this instance, between Aldous Huxley and Cecil Day Lewis over the latter's tract 'We're *not* going to do nothing' published by *The Left Review*. Eliot disputes the assumption that 'a world of Socialist states will be any more fraternal than the present world' and reminds us that 'Those professed "realists" [like Lewis], who so far surrender principles as to join in a Popular Front which is meaningless unless it is an extreme Left Front, will have only themselves to thank if they find that they have conjured up a spirit which will not go back into the bottle' (p.474). It would have been salutary for him to consider the obverse of his own caveat, and the demonic spirit which might have been conjured had reactionaries (as in Germany) surrendered *their* principles so as to align themselves with the extreme Right Front.

Eliot's 'Commentary' for October 1937 opens with his response to a manifesto of artists drawn from the 1937 Exhibition of the 'Unity of Artists for Peace, Democracy and Cultural Development'. He questions the assumptions underlying this declaration,

because these are not paragons for *every* artist; at least, not for artists sharing his political and aesthetic outlook. As to the first, enough of the hawk resides in him to agree that only when there is no conflict between peace and 'some higher value', or peace and 'some more immediate interest', are all 'sane' people for peace. He allows that 'all liberal-minded men are in favour of democracy', but refutes the pseudo-axiom that all good men are 'liberal-minded' and therefore democratic. By this two-way syllogism, democracy is disproved as an 'absolute good', and while the point is not made explicit, democracy's antitheses, despotism and totalitarianism, are not therefore 'absolute evils'. Lastly, as he would later expound in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, if an adherence to 'cultural progress' is prescriptive of an art which is not 'racial and local ... which is not representative of a particular people, but "international" ... [such art] may lose its sources of vitality'. Either way, for Eliot, 'the term "international" seems ... to belong to politics, and not to art' (pp. 81-82).

Naturally, Eliot does not wish to deny artists their political commission; to do so would fly in the face of the convoluted historical record between public affairs and art and invalidate much of his life's work along with that of his Modernist abettors. He is therefore at pains to emphasize that 'No one can object to "artists" banding themselves together for the purpose of advancing political tendencies with which they sympathize; but ... they have no claim to speak in the name of "Art" in general.... Whatever their views, it is not their distinction as artists, but only their general intelligence, that gives them authority to hold and propagate political views' (p.83).

This editorial concludes with Eliot's 'considerable misgiving' over the Poet Laureate, John Masefield's proposal to popularize literary art by making use of country taverns for 'verse-speaking, drama and readings of prose'. For staple reasons, Masefield's democratizing 'proposal of poetry for the million [*sic*] just has the wrong smell.... The spectre of the old liberal panacea of more education for everybody lurks in the background' (pp 84-85). But his real objection originates in the 'high' Modernist cultural elitism that is really a throwback to the decade before: 'what is important is not that this public [for poetry] should be large, but that it should be sensitive, critical and educated - conditions only possible for a small public' (p. 86). The antediluvian strategy at work here is to attempt to withhold education from the masses (at least in the liberal arts) and thereby preserve art in general, and poetry in particular, from vulgarisation.⁹⁷

In the penultimate *Criterion* for October 1938, Eliot's 'Commentary' discloses

⁹⁷ His editorials in the next two issues (January and April, 1938) continue in related vein; he worries that the Nuffield endowment of Oxford University and the creation of a National Theatre may lead to bureaucratic manipulation of these institutions and thence to their elitist unbarring in the name of public utility.

frankly his feelings towards the war in Spain. Astonishingly, with the fascist tide enjoying its threatening late 1930s flood, he suggests political dissent at home, not abroad, should be the first cause for concern. For this reason, 'Our concern should be with that part of the [British] public which is inclined to attribute all the "holiness" of this war to the party of Valencia and Barcelona' (that is, the Leftist Republican alliance; the beleaguered and legitimate Spanish government). With blinkers securely in place, he refers not so much 'to the small number of communists as to the larger number of the heirs of liberalism, who find an emotional outlet in denouncing the iniquity of something called "fascism".... The irresponsible "anti-fascist", the patron of mass-meetings and manifestoes, *is a danger in several ways*. His activities ... confuse the issue of real politics with misplaced religious fanaticism' (pp.58-59 - my emphasis).

It seems that with this particular journalistic forum about to be closed to him, Eliot unbridles his assorted grievances with modernity one final time. He directs the reader to the Conservative Viscount Lymington's latest book *Famine in England*. Like Eliot, Lymington has an obsession with the decline of agriculture in Britain and with the degeneration of the national character if rural traditions and values are not retained. (Two issues previously, Eliot had reiterated that 'The two most serious long-distance problems we have, apart from the ultimate religious problem, are the problem of Education [*sic*] and the problem of the Land - meaning by the latter the problem, not merely of how to grow enough food, but of how to obtain a proper balance between country and town life' [April, 1938, p. 482].) With Lymington, he postulates that 'to understand thoroughly what is wrong with agriculture is to understand what is wrong with nearly everything else: with the domination of Finance, with our ideals and system of Education, indeed with our whole philosophy of life ... What is fundamentally wrong is the *urbanization of mind* of which I have previously spoken ... as those who rule, those who speak, those who write [including, of course, himself], are developed in increasing numbers from an urban background' (pp.60-61 - original emphasis). Somehow we are to roll back two centuries of urbanisation and industrialisation and retrogress even further to feudalism: 'To have the right frame of mind ... it is necessary that the greater part of the population, of all classes ... should be settled in the country and dependent upon it'. Thanks to the moribund state of British liberal democracy, he bewails how 'There seems no hope [of reforms like these] in contemporary politics at all. Meanwhile the supposed progressive and liberal "intellectuals" shout themselves hoarse in denunciations of foreign systems of life [he indubitably means fascism] which they have not taken the trouble to comprehend ... *discerning the good [therein] from which we might profit*' (p.60 - my emphasis). Almost five years to the day since Hitler had taken Germany out of the League of Nations and the Disarmament Conference, counting down to another war now less than a year away, we still find Eliot

(as in *The Idea of a Christian Society*) championing the 'good' in continental fascism which Britain might adopt to its advantage.⁹⁸

With the January number of that foreboding year, 1939, Eliot, after seventy-one issues amassing nearly twelve thousand pages, signals the termination of *The Criterion* under the eloquent heading 'Last Words'. His editorials to the two prior issues had hinted at the difficulties (mainly financial) of keeping afloat a serious literary journal, let alone of properly recompensing its contributors. He confesses to having pondered this decision for two years past, knowing that his retirement 'would bring *The Criterion* to an end', but points to the 'staleness' that inevitably afflicts any editor after more than sixteen unbroken years. Realistically, or perhaps possessively, he does not think it is 'the kind of review which can be taken up and continued by one editor after another. Another man ... would be handicapped rather than aided by *The Criterion's* tradition.... [F]ar better for someone else to start a new review with a new title' (p.269). And what has been that 'tradition'? He goes on: '*The Criterion* has, I believe represented a *definite* though (I hope) comprehensive constellation of contributors' (my emphasis). Founded as it was in an immediate post-Great War spirit of what he continues to refer to as 'a period of illusions', he explains that 'Only from about the year 1926 did the features of the post-war world begin clearly to emerge - and not only in the sphere of politics' (p. 271). Was the journal an *agent* in this process of inter-war political escalation - for despite Eliot's qualification it was above all political - or its victim? If the latter, as Eliot retrospectively suggests, why then did *The Criterion's* intrinsic reactionary tenor pick up from around that selfsame year, 1926? And if a sharp wane in late 1920s internationalism and the demise of some hypothetical, moderate 'European Mind' are being cited as key components in a sort of ideological *force majeure* which finally defeated the review this simply does not hold water; the seeds of *The Criterion's* obscurantism had been securely planted by Eliot himself with his early editorials and the publication of *The Waste Land* (that depiction, in his own words, of 'the immense panorama of futility and anarchy that is contemporary history') in the very first issue, however much we find ourselves being drawn to concede that between the wars 'Divisions of political theory became more important; alien minds took alien ways'.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ In his October 1937 'Commentary', Eliot wrote about 'the amiable liberalism which in its diffusion has become the political religion of England', though he emphasized he was 'far from suggesting that any continental "ideology" should be taken over in this country; *only that the native one should be brought more up to date*, with a more realistic appreciation of the forces at work over there [Europe]' (my emphasis).

⁹⁹ 'Divisions of political theory' which produced the sorts of bigotry regularly appearing in the pages of *The Criterion* rendered the most far-flung and liberal of minds 'alien' during those inter-war years. An

Eliot confesses his inter-war frustration with Britain's traditional middle ground political liberalism when he admits to having 'felt obscurely during the last eight years years or so ... the grave dangers to this country which might result from the lack of any vital political philosophy, either explicit or implicit' (presumably this is a 'vital political philosophy' of the contemporary Continental type). But the most profound unburdening of all occurs with his acknowledgement that 'For myself, a right political philosophy came more and more to imply a right theology [though his editorials tended to reverse this sequence] - and right economics to depend upon right ethics: *leading to emphases which somewhat stretched the framework of a literary review*' (p. 272 - my emphasis).¹⁰⁰ Eliot confesses, too, his obsession with the communism which dominated so many of his 1930s editorials: 'perhaps I devoted too much of my gossiping attention, as Commentator, to the doctrines of communism. I can only say that I was commenting on ideas, or the lack of them, and not engaging in political philosophy'. And he has a diverting (if contestable in its specifics) explanation for his fixation with communism and his quiescence towards fascism: 'fascism ... appeared to have no great intellectual

article in the Christchurch *Press* newspaper Weekend feature 'This Week in History' for Saturday, November 25, 2000 reports from an article originally dated November 25, 1924, in which Professor John Macmillan Brown, the University of Canterbury's esteemed Pacific scholar (described in the Dictionary of New Zealand Biography as 'perhaps the outstanding university teacher in the country before 1900), traverses racist fears of the Japanese 'Yellow Peril' variety, as well as offering support for eugenics ('the new and admirable philanthropic [democratic] spirit [will let] 'the sub-criminals and weaklings whom they save go on breeding...[and] secure numbers chiefly in the degenerate ... The very existence of Western civilization is threatened'. Macmillan Brown goes on: 'What would make the West an easy prey to an organised Orient would be the spread of Socialistic opinions, the logical end of which is Bolshevism ... for this would dissolve patriotism and the courage that makes it effective'. Macmillan Brown feared the day of the 'White Race and its dominance' could soon be over, writing *The only chance is some arrest of its decay by an exotic inspiration, a new religion*' (p. 12 - my emphasis). As the reporter, Michael Vance, drily comments: 'The seeds of fascism were being sown in Christchurch as well as in Berlin'. However, before we condemn Macmillan Brown, or Eliot, or *The Criterion*'s contributors out of hand, we should have a thought for inter-war despondency and apocalypticism; all of their calamities seemed to arrive on an unprecedented scale, for example, the Great War, the Great Influenza Epidemic, and the Great Depression, turning inter-war Europe into what the Czech politician Thomas Masaryk called 'a laboratory atop a vast graveyard'. (Curiously, one momentous inter-war event, the General Strike of 1926 which involved three million workers at its peak, and which so bestirred Wyndham Lewis, for one, nowhere draws a mention in *The Criterion*.)

¹⁰⁰ The knowing interpreter is bound to add the rider that there is encodement at work even here - the adjective 'right' is readily transposable to the political 'Right'.

interest - and what is perhaps more important, was not sufficiently adaptable to be grafted on to the stock of Toryism - whereas communism flourished because it grew so easily on the Liberal root' (p. 272).

Pointedly, even in this editorial retrospective on the life of a *literary* review, political and economic considerations (the same 'emphases which ... stretched the [original] framework') continue to dominate. Even with war against fascism fast approaching, consider yet another oblique tribute to that system in his very last 'Commentary': 'to use a phrase like "moral re-armament" is to be in danger ... of suggesting that Britain should merely invoke "morals" in order to compete with the modern world on its own terms, instead of finding better terms; [it] is to risk the accusation of seeking to arouse enthusiasm and sacrifice for an order [liberal democracy] which is *in important respects inferior* to that [fascism] which threatens to supersede it' (p. 274 - my emphasis). As to monetary reform, he remains 'as convinced as anybody of the necessity of such change' to the extent that he now wonders aloud whether 'it would not have been more profitable, instead of trying to maintain literary standards increasingly repudiated in the modern world, to have endeavoured to rally intellectual effort to affirm those principles of life and policy from the lack of which we are suffering disastrous consequences' (p. 273). But this speculation is merely a pretence; no one knows better than Eliot how rallying 'intellectual effort' and affirming (Conservative) 'principles of life' were aims faithfully served throughout *The Criterion's* publishing life. All he means is that its political commission might have been better served if the journal had abandoned literary distractions in favour of overt political dissemination after the manner of the various Conservative pamphlets then in circulation. This said, while 'staleness' and 'increase of work in other directions' were offered by Eliot as reasons for his cessation of the journal, one wonders whether the narrow range of negative obsessions he hypertrophically restated, and the consistent 'tendency' of reaction gnawed away at by its most constant contributors did not finally pall. A comprehensive examination of his editorials, and the most palpable of the regulars' contributions, shows, throughout the 1930s in particular, a consistent grievance with modernity coupled with occasionally explicit, though more often shady, remedies.¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ As Jason Harding's *Times Literary Supplement* article 'A useful irritant: Montgomery Belgion, T.S. Eliot and the *Criterion*' confirms, 'what T.S. Eliot and Belgion [a frequent contributor of essays and book reviews to the journal, especially in its last 1930s phase] had in common was a strain of reactionary, occasionally intolerant, Orthodox Tory Anglican morality; a defining trait of the *Criterion* from the late 1920s onward'. If, as Harding says, 'Montgomery Belgion's outbursts of bigotry were a caricature of the *Criterion's* founding and highly cherished desire to fight a rearguard action on behalf of a tradition of

Through the medium of Eliot's own 'Commentaries' and a mounting preponderance of contributions *The Criterion* clearly set itself to a recitation of modern complaints. Yet, it never entirely neglected its calling as a forum of criticism for inter-war literature, even if, by the last issue, the list of books under review is dominated by monographs like Pound's *Guide to Kulchur*, John Middleton Murry's *Heaven - and Earth*, and Gerald Vann's *Morals Makyth Man* [sic]. Political 'tendency' or bias apart, Eliot was entitled to some pride in *The Criterion*, and not only for that constellation of (mostly Continental) writers whose work his was the first periodical to present in English. With its roll-call of essayists, the sheer range of its reviews and the liveliness of the debates which attended them, we can concur with his estimation that it *does* constitute a 'valuable record of the thought of that period between two wars' as evidenced by the combined author and subject index to the Faber and Faber collected edition, compiled by E. Alan Baker, which runs to a full 300 pages.

Eliot ends pessimistically by observing the ebbing vitality in contemporary arts and letters, which is for him but a symptom: 'the demoralization of society goes very much deeper.... In the present state of public affairs - which has induced in myself a depression of spirits so different from any other experience of fifty years as to be a new emotion - I no longer feel the enthusiasm necessary to make a literary review what it should be'. Despite this torpor, the Modernist aesthete in him is not prepared to bow out without one final sound on his artistic clarion: 'I feel that it is all the more essential that authors who are concerned with that small part of "literature" which is really creative - and seldom immediately popular - should apply themselves sedulously to their work, without abatement or sacrifice of their artistic standards on any pretext whatsoever' (pp. 274-275).

However apparently diverse its range of features and reviews, *The Criterion's* *raison d'être* was to provide a publishing forum for the many Conservatives among contemporary English-speaking and European 'men of letters', while attempting to appeal to any remnants of a non-aligned intellectual readership by way of its reactionary credo.¹⁰² As much as some part of Eliot sought to distance *The Criterion* from party politics, 'from the passions or fantasies of the moment' as he cared to put it,

Latin-Christian civilization' then, by extension, an Editor who chooses to *welcome* material from a bigot courts the danger of becoming similarly tainted.

¹⁰² These aspirations never wavered. In his editorial to the July 1938 issue, discussing a report on the state of the British Press by one of the kind of shadow social and economic planning groups mushrooming at the time under the heading 'Political and Economic Planning', Eliot baldly states 'That an editor [of a mass-circulation newspaper, or 'class' journal], or a single proprietor, should wish to influence the opinions of his readers is *natural and proper*' (p. 688 - my emphasis).

the confederacy of that 'common tendency' of reaction clearly pervades the nearly seventeen years of its publication, particularly from the late 1920s onward.¹⁰³ And if it exhibited bias, we need to remind ourselves of the waxing apocalyptic outlook of the period, reflected in a range of other hidebound periodicals then in circulation, for example, *Blackfriars*, the Catholic monthly, and *The Examiner*, an intrepid late 1930s fascist-leaning journal from America.

Strangely, Eliot's political oscillations between assertiveness and ambiguity seemed at their widest in *The Criterion's* last years. At times, he appeared content to sit back, Svengali-like, and allow the fires of reaction he had fanned consume the journal. On the strength of certain of his last, relatively judicious commentaries, one might be excused for thinking he had begun to forego obscurantist extremism for a more equable political centre, were it not for his blatant relapse in *The Idea of a Christian Society* just a few weeks after pronouncing these pensive 'last words', his clandestine interest in a more militant Christianity as espoused by the Moot, and his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* still nine years away.¹⁰⁴ *The Criterion's* end merely betokened Eliot's disenchantment with overt political promulgation. It was the medium which changed, not the message. His dispute with participative democracy and the liberalism which, for him, never ceased 'its shrill choruses in England' was to continue undiminished.

¹⁰³ (For a representative selection from a plethora of contributors' articles reactionary in tone, see Appendix B.)

¹⁰⁴ And, of course, the creative writing. Following the outbreak of war (and putting 'Notes' aside, which was drafted during the war years anyway), it is rather that he henceforth abandoned maladroit political prose for more subtle forms of conservative encodement; consider the poetry, and especially, the drama still to come.

CONCLUSION

(i)

Where is the Life we have lost in living?

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

The cycles of Heaven in twenty centuries

Bring us farther from GOD and nearer to the Dust

(Choruses from 'The Rock' [1934] *I. The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven*).

(ii)

Two rival heavens-on-earth have been put on the market ... Many attempts have been made to define the conflict between them. Mr Wyndham Lewis, for instance, sees it as a clash between nationalism and internationalism; others have demonstrated that it is between Christianity and atheism, dictatorship and democracy, capitalism and communism, tyranny and freedom, bourgeoisie and proletariat. Even the nomenclature used is uncertain, Left and Right, Fascist and anti-Fascist ... and to add to the confusion, the two factions have tended to range themselves behind two existent regimes, the U.S.S.R. and the Third Reich ... It expresses a deep cleavage of opinion, a deep discord between ... a Brave New World and a Brave Old World facing one another and menacingly flourishing the same weapons. More and more this conflict [has come] to provide the underlying pattern of thought, whether in politics, literature or religion. It [has become] an obsession from which no one [is] wholly immune, creeping into novels, plays, poems, literary criticism, sermons, lectures, conversation, films, [and even] music-hall turns

(Malcolm Muggeridge, with the authority of contemporaneity behind him, writing in his 1940 book *The Thirties 1930 - 1940 in Great Britain*, pp.23-24.).

In all of Eliot's social discursions there remained a fixity of Conservative political purpose, as if he were seeking to place the vital social organism somehow outside the grasp of time, change, and history. In this, he signally failed to grasp the realities of a modern society which was the product of a massive population explosion and two centuries of industrial revolution, of colonial expansion, an unprecedented worldwide conflagration (with signs of worse to come), runaway consumerism, prodigious advances in the physical and social sciences, and of course, fiercely contending political ideologies. By the mid-twentieth century, Yeats's 'ceremony of innocence' had indeed been 'drowned', and four centuries of the liberal humanist trends Eliot so despised meant there could be no turning back, least of all to the kind of harmonious Ruritania he quaintly advocated as its general panacea.

Fleeing a family tradition of Unitarianism, raised in the anti-humanism of his Harvard didact Irving Babbitt, shaped by the anti-democratic tirades of the French neo-royalist Catholic reactionaries, and fortified by T.E.Hulme's pinched view of

human nature, it was inevitable that he would subscribe to an oppositional art and an oppositional politics. What distinguished Eliot from a more candid Modernist blimp like Pound, who craved nothing less than 'a new civilization', was that Eliot's persona had a sort of extra layer: that of the convert to Christianity. His manifold inconsistencies (some of which this thesis has highlighted) arose from the fact of his public roles as art critic and cultural guru, literary colossus, and (post-1927) defender of the Faith; every contradiction in him traces the faultlines of that trinity. The portrait of Eliot by Patrick Heron reproduced as frontispiece to this thesis captures that dividedness, while the subject's diverted gaze epitomizes his prevaricating tendencies.

For Eliot, order and tradition in temporal affairs were paramount. Good order meant good health in the body politic, and was akin to beauty and transcendent 'truth' in literature and the other arts. Like nineteenth-century predecessors in Ruskin, Arnold, and Morris, and contemporaries in Yeats and Pound, Eliot thought that culture occupied a pivotal position at the centre of national identity; as he once wrote, in stock Modernist manner, 'One great test of a society is the kind of art it produces'. Modernity, materialistic, individualistic, and humanistic, had proved itself morbid in those dual spheres of society and culture. One of its principal legacies, urbanisation, had turned the 'New Jerusalem' which might have been built in England into the representative human metropolis of the 'unreal city' of London - a bleak, incommodious locality where only 'The wind / Crosses the brown land, unheard'. For all these reasons, the reimposition of tradition and authority became, for Eliot, the first order of business in the renovation of societal consciousness.¹⁰⁵ But it is the perambulation between his purely political theorising, his studied elitism, his reliance on authoritarianism, and his mistrust of social reform, which stamps Eliot as the true reactionary. His opposition to universal education and other forms of social improvement, one of his least appealing characteristics, can be explained by his belief that a society systematized along durable hierarchical lines would be undeviating and constant, and thereby impervious to change, not needful of, or susceptible to social 'tinkering'. For Eliot, the historical past ought not be abandoned; instead, its accumulated sapience and experience had to be retained in order that it might continue to shape and inform present human choices and actions

¹⁰⁵ After all, the subject of Eliot's dissertation at Harvard University had been the contemporary Welsh-born idealist philosopher, Francis Herbert Bradley. Idealism opposed the individualistic postulations of recent Utilitarianism; Bradley argued (in terms that Eliot never forgot) that the concept of the individual is a fallacious, even dangerous abstraction, and that human beings are what they are because of and by virtue of their membership of the collective, communitarian human enterprise. Thus, we are born into a coherent social structure, and are educated throughout life to take our place in that collective and conform with its mores.

and counter the dialectical materialism and the spiritual estrangement which he saw as the universal sicknesses left by Marxism and Darwinism. Moreover, loudly maligning 'wormeaten' modernity did double duty for him: it enabled him to take up the artist's traditionally confrontational stance, which in a time of endemic uncertainty was calculated to achieve ready notice for his work, while it also helped undermine the status quo and hastened the return to the social conditions of the past which he believed history had shown to be best for Church and society alike.¹⁰⁶

In the concluding Part IV of *The Idea of a Christian Society*, Eliot reiterated the distinction between the spiritual and temporal realms: 'To identify any particular form of government with Christianity is a dangerous error: for it confounds the permanent with the transitory, the absolute with the contingent' (p.57). The objective reader might well retort that in this and his other volumes of social criticism, he systematically ignored his own caution, but this sort of charge fails to take account of the difficulties of his position. Eliot knew that in the late-modern secular era, the religious 'absolute' was waging an unwinnable battle with the materialistic 'contingent', and 'dangerous error' though it may have been, in order to preserve the nucleus of a longterm Christian society, Orthodoxy had to align itself with the form of political government most receptive to it. The irony was not lost on him that the promise of this much-sought congenial political system was being held out by the 'pagan' totalitarianism he otherwise feared and often derided, and explains more than anything else his vacillating courtship of it.

Rarely does the defence of historicism fail to extricate those whose judgements have been rendered *déclassé* by history, even where such revisionism amounts, in Karl Popper's denunciation, to the 'substitution of historical prophecy for conscience'. But in Eliot's case it seems that the more his monographs of 'social criticism' and their implications are explored and juxtaposed to the occasions of their delivery, the less this nostrum becomes available to him.¹⁰⁷ The two 1930s lectures/volumes in particular,

¹⁰⁶ Even one of Eliot's nineteenth-century liberal opponents, J.S. Mill, had acknowledged (in a series of articles written in 1831 for the weekly journal *Examiner*, under the heading 'The Spirit of the Age', that a completely 'open' society (to use Karl Popper's later term) entirely devoid of a tradition of moral and communal norms could not hope to retain its 'free' character; reaction, as a natural corrective to ethical and social turmoil, would of necessity set in. And it seems that even the Utilitarian Mill developed democratic 'cold feet' when confronted with the prospect of the normative tyranny of the proletarian majority.

¹⁰⁷ As the critic L.G. Salinger put it as long ago as 1961, 'We owe an immense debt to Eliot for extending the range of English poetry. But it is a chilling reflection on the poet and on his age that so distinguished a writer should have spent so much of his energy on negation' ('T.S. Eliot: Poet and Critic', in *The*

After Strange Gods and *The Idea of a Christian Society*, were self-evidently untimely and nefarious in their likely consequences for the political and social order they projected. Their measured benisons towards anti-Semitism and fascism took Eliot as far down the paths of thirties popularism as he dared to tread while his postwar vision of cultural Utopia, *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*, maintained a political and social perverseness that was manifestly out of step with domestic political trends and international attitudes.¹⁰⁸ And under his long stewardship, *The Criterion* enunciated the entire spectrum of inter-war political reaction.

It is not too far-fetched a simile (and is probably one that would have appealed to him) to liken Eliot to the prophet Moses, seeking to lead the redeemed Christian, reactionary elect out of the corrupt land of modernity. Like the unremitting forewarnings of his Old Testament forebear, his entire *œuvre* (the creative writing, the criticism, and the socio-political prose considered here) is reducible to an Orthodox plea for the renunciation of that late-modern, liberal democratic, materialistic Western society which had become a debased and illegitimate civilization and had lost its (roughly in the order of the texts here discussed) ethical, hierarchical, cultural, and ecclesiastical essences. Like the privations God visited on the Israelites, causing them to wander in the desert for forty years, some form of social purgation by political extremism was the only expedient for arresting the slide ('If a scheme commends itself to us on the whole, we are willing to take risks for the sake of ending an intolerable situation', *Criterion* editorial, April 1935). Because fascism was purposive about restoring community and social mutuality, sought to preserve the past, respected agrarian traditions, paid lip-service to State-sanctioned religions, and placed an emphasis on folklore and myth in order to exalt the national character (thereby promising modern artists a meaningful vocation), it came with all the right credentials for administering that first-stage 'shock-treatment'. When this phase of lustration had run its course, into the hiatus would step the enduring Church, which would not make the same neglectful mistakes twice; it would henceforth, through the agency of indoctrinated political leaders and watchdog organs like the 'Community of Christians',

Modern Age, p. 366).

¹⁰⁸ Allowances can perhaps be made for *After Strange Gods*, written and presented during the breakdown of his eighteen-year marriage. He did forbid its republication, and later referred to it as the product of a 'sick period' in his life. And as to the opprobrious anti-Semitic remarks in it, Eliot was doubtless encouraged by the (now, of course, forgotten) anti-Semitic climate of interwar America. In his *Facing up to Modernity*, Peter Berger records how 'Anti-Semitism came to be a significant feature of American life ... Anti-Semitism probably reached its zenith ... in the 1920s and 1930s, when anti-Semitic newspapers and radio columnists proliferated and reached out into many American homes' (p.272).

maintain a close superintendence over temporal affairs to go with its sacred calling. But rather than a reconciliation of Church and State, this would amount to the Church's outright *annexation* of temporal governance. In effect, the project of Eliot and his fellow Orthodox converts was the restoration of an austere Augustinianism in late-modern political and social culture. Their ideal was the social as well as theological transformation of the modern metropolis, that Augustinian 'Earthly City', so that it might become the manifest contemporary expression - not mere theological conception - of the saint's 'City of God', populated now and forever by those whose lives and social practices were tempered by their commitment to the Christian Way.

Counting down the hours, the faithful must sound the Word of John's Revelation and 'prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings', crying against the canker of modernity before God's apocalyptic wrath is brought down on twentieth-century Babylon:

Here is a place of disaffection
 Time before and time after
 In a dim light: neither daylight
 Investing form with lucid stillness
 Turning shadow into transient beauty
 With slow rotation suggesting permanence
 Nor darkness to purify the soul
 Emptying the sensual with deprivation
 Cleansing affection from the temporal.
 Neither plenitude nor vacancy. Only a flicker
 Over the strained time-ridden faces
 Distracted from distraction by distraction
 Filled with fancies and empty of meaning
 Tumid apathy with no concentration
 Men and bits of paper, whirled by the cold wind
 That blows before and after time,
 Wind in and out of unwholesome lungs
 Time before and time after.
 Eructation of unhealthy souls
 Into the faded air, the torpid
 Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of London,
 Hampstead and Clerkenwell, Campden and Putney,
 Highgate, Primrose and Ludgate. Not here
 Not here the darkness, in this twittering world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND LIST OF WORKS CITED

Abercrombie, Nicholas, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner (Editors). *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* (Second Edition). Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1988.

Arnold, Matthew. *Selected Prose*. (Edited and introduced by P.J. Keating). Harmondsworth Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1970.

Asher, Kenneth. *T.S. Eliot and Ideology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Austin, Allen. 'The Social Criticism' in *T.S. Eliot: Critical Assessments* (Volume IV). Graham Clarke (Editor). London: Christopher Helm Ltd., 1990 (pp.157-171).

Babbitt, Irving. *Democracy and Leadership*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962.

Berger, Peter. *Facing up to Modernity*. New York: Basic Books, 1977.

Birch, Dinah. *Ruskin and the Dawn of the Modern*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Bivort de la Saudee, Jacques de (Editor). *God, Man and the Universe: A Christian Answer to Modern Materialism*. London: Burns and Oates, 1954.

Blair, Sara. 'Modernism and the politics of culture' in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Michael Levenson (Editor). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 (pp.157-173).

Bradbury, Malcolm. *The Social Context of Modern English Literature*. Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1971.

Canary, Robert H. *T.S. Eliot: The Poet and His Critics*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1982.

Chace, William. *The Political Identities of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973.

Chefdor, Monique, Ricardo Quinones, and Albert Wachtel (Editors) *Modernism: Challenges and Perspectives*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

Childs, Peter. *Modernism*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Clarke, Graham (Editor). *T.S. Eliot: Critical Assessments*. (In four volumes) London: Christopher Helm Ltd., 1990.

Craig, Cairns. *Yeats, Eliot, Pound, and the Politics of Poetry*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982.

Dillon, C.J. *Poems for Spain: The Response of British Poets to the Spanish Civil War*. Christchurch, NZ: University of Canterbury Master's Thesis, 1975.

Eagleton, Terry (Editor). *Ideology*. Harlow, Essex: Longman Group UK Limited, 1994.

Eliot, T.S. *Collected Poems 1909 - 1962*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1974.

Eliot, T.S. *Selected Essays*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1953.

Eliot, T.S. *After Strange Gods*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1934.

Eliot, T.S. *The Idea Of A Christian Society*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1942.

Eliot, T.S. *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1963.

Eliot, T.S. (Editor). *The Criterion: A Literary Review*. (Collected Edition in eighteen volumes, 1922-1939) London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1967.

Eliot, Valerie (Editor). *The Letters of T.S. Eliot* (volume I, 1898 - 1922) New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1988.

Ford, Boris (Editor). *The Modern Age* (Volume 7 of The Pelican Guide to English

- Literature - third edition). Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975.
- Gibson, Mary Ellis. *Epic Reinvented: Ezra Pound and The Victorians*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- Hamilton, Alastair. *The Appeal of Fascism: A Study of Intellectuals and Fascism 1919 - 1945*. London: Anthony Blond Ltd., 1971.
- Harding, Jason. 'A useful irritant: Montgomery Belgion, T.S. Eliot and the *Criterion*'. *The Times Literary Supplement*, August 25 2000, No.5082, (pp.14-15).
- Harrison, John R. *The Reactionaries*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1967.
- Haslett, Moyra. *Marxist Literary and Cultural Theories*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000.
- Helm, Paul (Editor). *Faith and Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Honderich, Ted (Editor). *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Hulme, T.E. *Speculations*. (Edited by Herbert Read.) London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1960.
- James, William. *The Letters of William James*. (Edited by his son, Henry James.) London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1920.
- Jay, Mike and Michael Neve (Editors). *1900: A Fin-de-siècle Reader*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1999.
- Julius, Anthony. *T.S. Eliot, anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Kates, Gary (Editor). *The French Revolution: Recent Debates and New Controversies*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Keating, P.J. (Editor). *Matthew Arnold: Selected Prose*. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1987.

- Kearns, Cleo McNelly. 'Religion, literature, and society in the work of T.S. Eliot' in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*. A. David Moody (Editor). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994 (pp.77-93).
- Kemal, Salim and Ivan Gaskell (Editors). *Politics and Aesthetics in the Arts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Kenner, Hugh. *A Sinking Island: The Modern English Writers*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1988.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Kojecky, Roger. *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1971.
- Kolocotroni, Vassiliki, Jane Goldman, and Olga Taxidou (Editors). *Modernism: An Anthology of Sources and Documents*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Levenson, Michael. *A Genealogy of Modernism: A Study of English Literary Doctrine 1908-1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Levenson, Michael (Editor). *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Llobera, Josep R. *The God of Modernity: The Development of Nationalism in Western Europe*. Oxford: Berg, 1994.
- McClelland, J.S. *A History of Western Political Thought*. London: Routledge, 1996.
- McGowan, John. *Postmodernism and its Critics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- McLeish, Kenneth (Editor). *Key Ideas in Human Thought*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Limited, 1993.
- Marietta, Don E. Jr. *Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*. Armonk, New York: M.E.

Sharpe, Inc., 1998.

Martin, Mildred (Editor). *A Half-Century of Eliot Criticism: An Annotated Bibliography of Books and Articles in English, 1916-1965*. Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1972.

Martin, Wallace. *The New Age under Orage: Chapters in English Cultural History*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967.

May, Simon. *Nietzsche's Ethics and his War on "Morality"*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1999.

Mazower, Mark. *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century*. London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1998.

Mencken, H.L. (Editor). *H.L. Mencken's Dictionary of Quotations on Historical Principles from Ancient and Modern Sources*. London: Collins, 1982.

Miller, Tyrus. *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

Moody, A. David. *Thomas Stearns Eliot / Poet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Moody, A. David (Editor). *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Morrison, Paul. *The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Paul de Man*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Muggeridge, Malcolm. *The Thirties 1930 - 1940 in Great Britain*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1940.

Munby, D.L. *The Idea of a Secular Society and its Significance for Christians*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.

Newman, John Henry Cardinal. *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of his Religious Opinions*. (Edited, with an Introduction and Notes, by Martin J.

Svaglic.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *A Nietzsche Reader*. (Selected and translated by R.J. Hollingdale.) Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1977.

North, Michael. *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Ortega y Gasset, Jose. *The Revolt of the Masses*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1932.

Pearce, Joseph. *Literary Converts: Spiritual Inspiration in an Age of Unbelief*. London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.

Perry, Michael C. and others. *The Churchman's Companion*. London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1964.

Persoon, James. *Modern British Poetry, 1900-1939*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999.

Pound, Ezra. *Selected Poems 1908 - 1959*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1990.

Raban, Jonathan. *The Society of the Poem*. London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1971.

Remond, Rene. *Religion and Society in Modern Europe*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1999.

Reynolds, Barbara. 'Dorothy's Dante: A fiftieth anniversary tribute to Sayers's *Commedia*'. *The Times Literary Supplement*. December 17 1999, No.5046, pp.11-13.

Ricks, Christopher. *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1988.

Roston, Murray. *Modernist Patterns in Literature and the Visual Arts*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.

Russell, John. *The Meanings of Modern Art*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1985.

- Salingar, L.G. 'T.S. Eliot: Poet and Critic' in *The Modern Age*. Boris Ford (Editor). Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1975 (pp.348-367).
- Schuchard, Ronald. *Eliot's Dark Angel: Intersections of Life and Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Scott, Peter Dale. 'The social critic and his discontents' in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*. A. David Moody (Editor). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994 (pp.60-76).
- Smart, Ninian. *The World's Religions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Sultan, Stanley. *Eliot, Joyce and Company*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Trilling, Lionel. *The Liberal Imagination: Essays on Literature and Society*. London: Mercury Books, 1961.
- Vance, Michael. 'Warning of Japanese threat' in *This Week in History*, 'Weekend' feature article. Christchurch: *The Press* newspaper for Saturday, November 25, 2000.
- Wells, H.G. *Mr Belloc Objects to 'The Outline of History'*. London: Watts and Co., 1926.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*. London: Verso, 1989.
- Wilson, A.N. *God's Funeral*. New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1999.
- Wilson, Edmund. *Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870 - 1930*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954.
- Woodcock, George. *Writers and Politics*. Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1990.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - SOME CORE ELEMENTS OF CONSERVATIVE OR RIGHT-WING SOCIO-POLITICAL THOUGHT

Some of the fundamental values underlying Conservative or right-wing social politics include:

The pre-eminence of an enduring system of social hierarchization and thus absolute coherence of community. This explains the Conservative's suspicion of egalitarian democracy and their antipathy to its first principle, universal suffrage.

Obedience to legitimate authority. Authority maintains order; challenging authority threatens social chaos.

The importance of a stable monarchy.

The family as the primary social building block and font of ethical and communitarian values. (The family is often sanctified as the temporal replica of the Holy Family.)

The maintenance of cultural and nationalistic traditions. Customs and traditions convey the accumulated wisdom of the past.

A belief in some idealized, long-vanished, and often wholly-imagined 'Golden Age'. In this way current generations are challenged and inspired by an always unreachable ideal.

The safeguarding of private property rights as the just reward for individual labour.

An opposition to internationalism. Conservatism's first loyalty is to the national collective, and for this reason, it may display rudiments of xenophobia.

An acknowledgment of humankind's thirst for supra-rationalism and mysticism (specifically expressed in the religious impulse), and the unpredictability and even appetite for violence in the human makeup. (This goes with humankind's 'fallen nature' and helps justify the need for hierarchy and authority in the social system.)

An anti-humanitarianism (traceable back through T.E. Hulme, Pascal, and Augustine) to Old Testament purviews of human nature as being irretrievably tainted by Original Sin and therefore non-perfectible.

APPENDIX B - A SHORT SELECTION OF ARTICLES, REACTIONARY IN CHARACTER, DRAWN FROM 1930s ISSUES OF *THE CRITERION*

Christopher Dawson, 'The End of An Age' (April 1930): 'In Western Europe the decadence of the humanist tradition has left the European mind so weak that it is no longer capable of any metaphysical conviction.... [I]t is this dead civilization which is apotheosized in the mythology of Hollywood' (Vol. IX, pp.393-395).

Arthur J. Penty, 'Means and Ends' (October 1931): 'Breakdowns in health are warnings to a man to mend his ways. If he pays no attention to the repeated warnings, one comes at last which proves fatal. It is the same with society. Our recurring trade depressions are warnings to society to face the facts and mend its ways' (Vol. XI, pp.23-24).

D.S. Mirsky, 'H.G. Wells and History' (October 1932): 'Wells has no leading idea, no point of view, no criterion - his books are like jellyfish' (Vol. XII, p.4).

Joseph Needham, 'Laudian Marxism' (October 1932): 'If these effects of the domination of science in the modern world are allowed to operate alone, we shall have a truly soulless society, and this is what we shall certainly get if capitalism can re-establish itself and overcome the forces of fanatical nationalism which seem most likely to disrupt it' (Vol. XII, p.71).

Douglas Jerrold, 'Authority, Mind and Power' (January 1933): 'If the nations of Europe, the historical heirs to the Christian tradition and the classical culture, have a message for the modern world, they must deliver it with the utmost ruthlessness of insistence.... [R]establish[ing], for the individual, the authority of the family ... the authority of the State, and ... the paramount authority of Justice' (Vol. XII, p.242).

Montgomery Belgion, 'A Postscript on Mr Andre Gide' (April 1933): 'Scarcely anybody truly disapproves of people like Hatry and De Valera, Kreuger and Hitler. Our admiration of them would be unbounded if only they "brought it off", and most of us are only restrained from emulating them by lack of self-confidence and fear of the consequences' (Vol. XII, p.411).

Howard Baker, 'Belief and Dogma' (July 1933): 'Worry about civilization and the end to which it is going ... [H]as led us into the tangle of [Oswald] Spengler's thinking; and in the form of such semi-political movements as American Humanism, it continually threatens us with new tangles. The great fallacy is that of trying to order the soul of society while the individual souls remain unordered' (Vol. XII, p.608).

Philip Mairet, 'The Moral Dilemma of the Age of Science' (January 1934): 'My endeavour has been to show that there is, underlying our economic disorder and reinforcing it, a psychic attitude which is in itself abnormal and unhealthy' (Vol. XIII, p.201).

Christopher Dawson, 'Religion and the Totalitarian State' (October 1934): 'It is

obvious that a Totalitarian State, whether of the Fascist or the democratic type, cannot afford to leave so great a power of influencing public opinion [referring to the popular press and the film industry] in private hands' (Vol.XIV, p.11). (Note Dawson's disturbing pairing of Fascism and democracy under the one 'totalitarian' banner.)

Hoffman Nickerson, 'War, Democracy and Peace' (April 1935): 'It is not impossible that the new forms of minority government, Communist and especially Fascist, may give the world a breathing spell from the mass massacres of democratic war' (Vol.XIV, p.363).

Ezra Pound, 'The Individual in his Milieu' (October 1935): 'You can not [*sic*] make good economics out of bad ethics' (Vol.XV, p.45).

Rayner Heppenstall, 'The Frankness of the West' (April 1936): 'These facts (emergent in the West) seem to me necessary reflections of the decay of an order of society' (Vol.XV, p.439).

William G. Peck, 'Divine Democracy' (January 1937): 'Democracy has been called to suffer the just judgment passed upon the bastard system which has increasingly governed the Western world since the beginning of the industrial revolution, and finally failed to cope with the economic collapse subsequent to the [Great] War' (Vol.XVI, p.256).

Henry S. Swabey, 'The English Church and Money' (July 1937): 'Affairs in England in 1937 are under the thumb of High Finance.... The right to issue money has been stolen from the country, and our politicians consort and dine with usurers, while nearly all countries are divided and diverted by meaningless party strife' (Vol. XVI, pp.619 & 636).

The Rev. Edward Quinn, 'Christian Politics' (July 1938): '[T]he modern state is at fault.... Hope lies in the revival of authority and in the re-establishment of organic unity.... [T]he realisation of man's [*sic*] spiritual nature must lead to a new respect for Christianity' (Vol.XVII, p.644).

K.E. Barlow, 'Evolution Involuted' (October 1938): 'There can have been no period in history when man had so much learning and so little philosophy.... All we have to explain ourselves to ourselves is the fag-end of an analogy [the now *démodée* doctrine of Evolution] which, without logic though it was, had yet the power to shake man out of his traditional approach to his God and the universe. Now this is ragged and spent up. Man looks too often down a gun-barrel' (Vol.XVIII, pp.35-36).

APPENDIX C - A BACKGROUND TO THE CHRISTIAN POLITICAL GINGER GROUP THE `MOOT'

(i)

[I]n the origin and in the exercise of her mission ... the church is independent of any earthly power, not merely in regard to her lawful end and purpose, but also in regard to whatever means she may deem suitable and necessary to attain them

(Pope Pius XI: *Divini illius magistri* [1929]).

(ii)

Doctrinally, the Church may be said to have been fighting a rearguard action. After the slaughter caused by its encounters with science in the latter part of the nineteenth century, scattered forces were gathered together, broken ranks reformed, and a not very convincing offensive undertaken from the abandoned enemy lines

(Malcolm Muggeridge, *The Thirties 1930 - 1940 in Great Britain*, p.13).

As outlined in Chapter 2, Eliot, in his Preface to *The Idea of a Christian Society* acknowledged owing 'a great deal to conversations with certain friends whose minds are engrossed by these [socio-political] and similar problems'. Those 'certain friends' evasively referred to included members of the 'Moot', an association of Christian intellectuals who had banded together to find ways of implementing the resolutions of the major 1937 ecclesiastical conference convened at Oxford under the title, politically appropriate for its time, of 'Church, Community, and State'.¹⁰⁹ This conference,

¹⁰⁹ Much of the material for this appendix was gleaned from Roger Kojecky's *T.S. Eliot's Social*

involving delegates of Christians from forty countries, succeeded a similar gathering in Stockholm in 1925 and was the consummation of the long-standing crisis of modernity besetting Christianity as a whole: the search for a kind of *modus vivendi* with the proliferating liberal democratic state. The conference concerned itself with a broad-based enquiry into the nature of the modern state, and of the Church's right relationship within materialistic, secular society. The bodeful European political scene lent the conference an air of urgency (pointed up by the non-attendance of the German Evangelical Church, forbidden to participate by the Nazi government) and fundamental to its purpose was a drawing together of the Christian Church so as to define itself in universal (and ecumenical) terms.¹¹⁰ In this way the Church hoped to become proactive in the secular realm and to counter the resurgence of militant nationalism in a way it had failed to do in the countdown to the Great War.

The conference was divided into five working sections, each charged with the responsibility of considering a working document and the production of a detailed report for submission to a plenary session. Eliot found himself in that section appointed to discuss the current economic system, and although Roger Kojecky reports the section chairman recalling how 'the group ... put in some long hours in the preparation of their report' and that 'Eliot took an active part, and was at once courteous and decisive', there is a certain hypocrisy about someone holding rigidly ingrained attitudes over social class lending their name to a communique which has more than a whiff of welfare socialism about it, saying *inter alia*

Right fellowship between man and man being a condition of man's fellowship with God, every economic arrangement which frustrates or restricts it must be modified - and in particular such ordering of economic life as tends to divide the community into classes based upon differences of wealth and to occasion a sense of injustice among the poorer members of society.¹¹¹

Six months after Oxford, two small follow-up conferences were held at Lambeth

Criticism. For more information on the proceedings of Moot meetings, see Kojecky, Chapter 9: 'A Christian Elite'. Kojecky's text also includes an appendix which lists attendance at nineteen of the twenty-one Moot meetings convened between April 1938 and July 1945. This shows Eliot to have been one of the more diligent of attendees. The roll-call of 35 persons is also illuminative for the number of regular *Criterion* contributors it contains.

¹¹⁰ Somehow this fact (the Nazi interdiction of the German Evangelical Church) seemed quite lost on Eliot, so that his *Idea of a Christian Society* could still, almost two years later, be blithely anticipating accommodations between the Church and fascism.

¹¹¹ Taken from the Conference Report, purposefully entitled *The Churches Survey Their Task* (1937) and quoted in Kojecky, *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, p.158.

Palace to implement the formation of the British branch of a new international federation of Christians, to be called the World Council of Churches. At the first of these, the gathering proposed the formation of a subsidiary association of mostly lay intellectuals of worldly insight and experience and in April 1938 a group of twelve, most of them prominent attendees at the original Oxford conference (including Eliot, Christopher Dawson, and Dr J.H. Oldham, its organising secretary), met at High Leigh, Hertfordshire, subsequently dubbing themselves the 'Moot'. From its inception the group's focus, with the Austrian *Anschluss* fresh in everyone's mind, was the current political situation. Public apathy towards the Oxford Conference and inertia within the Church itself in implementing conference resolutions induced Moot members to look to the spectacular national consciousness-raising successes of the German Nazi party.¹¹² This schizoid attitude towards fascism, specifically Nazism, made up of dubiety on the one hand and admiration on the other, doubtless explains why, at this very first meeting, Dawson proposed his own solution for Christianity's decline. This would be '*a totalitarian Christian Order ... the Kingdom of God - a very long range policy*', which according to Kojecky drew the purely facetious retort from Eliot that 'the best thing a totalitarian state could do would be to abdicate' (my emphasis).¹¹³ Reflecting prevailing public opinion, there was also some division along militaristic and pacifist lines over Britain's and America's acquiescence in German aggression and imperialism, with John Middleton Murry (who was to edit the journal *Peace News* from 1940 to 1946) to the pacifist fore.

At the conclusion of this first meeting, the group resolved to continue as a Christian symposium and to invite prominent Christians and sympathetic leaders in public life to participate by invitation in its future conclaves. These invitees ranged, as Kojecky reports, from 'Professor Karl Mannheim [the eminent sociologist and refugee from Nazism] from the London School of Economics, [to] Professor N.F. Hall, Director of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research [to] the Archbishop of York, William Temple'. Kojecky also relates how Eliot gave a frank description of his work with *The Criterion*, along with an unguarded slip over editorial bias (which is also revealing of the political sympathies of the gathering), by affirming how 'he would like to engage as *Criterion* contributors people interested in the kind of work this group had in mind'.¹¹⁴ (Given that he was already contemplating the journal's cessation, and it had

¹¹² John Middleton Murry introduced his discussion paper to Moot members entitled 'Towards a Christian Theory of Society' by saying 'I regard it as no more *inherently* impossible that our society should be converted to Christianity than for the Germans to be converted to Nazism'.

¹¹³ Quoted in *T.S. Eliot's Social Criticism*, p.164.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.165.

but three issues to run, this solicitation seems in bad faith.)

At its second meeting in September 1938 held at Westfield College, London (this time with sixteen persons present), Middleton Murry chose to explore what was the group's paramount concern, the prospects of a reforged relationship between Church and State, under the auspices of a discussion paper entitled 'Towards a Christian Theory of Society'. Murry's theocratic contention that 'in any form of society a ruling class is necessary [and that] it is possible and urgently desirable that the ruling class in our modern society should be preponderantly composed of men of Christian imagination' doubtless reinforced Eliot's doctrinal thinking and encouraged him to 'go public' with the Corpus Christi lectures that made up *The Idea of a Christian Society* six months later.

The third Moot, held in January 1939, included among its deliberations a study of Jacques Maritain's recently-published *Humanisme integral*, a modified version of the proto-authoritarian theocracies of Murry and Eliot. But while recognizing the peculiarities of the Church and secular society, Maritain commended a system of government by a lay Christian meritocracy, implemented and maintained by as much absolutism as strictly necessary. Kojecky records that this third Moot resolved also 'to crystallize the [political and social] issues of the moment ... and to win support from the 200-300 people' among whom it proposed to circulate a form of manifesto. (Included in this circulation list were 'a number of bishops, the actual Moot members, and men such as Anthony Eden, Richard Crossman, Basil Liddell Hart, Desmond Hawkins, Lord Stamp and Arnold Toynbee'.) Kojecky records that Oldham, the document's draftsman, 'felt that something on the lines of a Christian parallel to *Mein Kampf* was needed at this time'.¹¹⁵

In the same vein, Kojecky reports on the discussion of a paper presented by Karl Mannheim, newly recruited to 'Moot' ranks. According to Kojecky, Mannheim rehearsed the movement's plan of campaign, saying 'Society could be changed, not by revolution but by persuading those with power of their responsibilities, and by uniting the intelligentsia. A greater degree of social planning was the only way of avoiding totalitarian control.' What Mannheim meant, of course, was the persuading of those with power of their *Christian* responsibilities, and the unification of a *Christian* intelligentsia, while his preference for 'a greater degree of social planning', that is, a blueprint for enhanced social intervention and manipulation contrived by and enforced by meritocrats seems different only in degree from the totalitarianism it feigns to avoid; rather like fascism with the populist element removed. For the zealous Mannheim, 'The most doubtful question was the possibility of creating the *elite required, quickly*

¹¹⁵ Ibid., pp.168-9.

enough' (my emphasis).¹¹⁶

The Moot owed something of its existence to the Christian philosophy of Maritain along with Mannheim's own Theory of Elites, and sought to become what Oldham called a 'Church within the Church'. This cabalistic, *politicised* inner Church was the relevant one for the modern age because it alone could influence the minds that mattered and initiate real change 'so that in a generation we might have a totally different society in Britain'.¹¹⁷ In effect, it was to be both prototype and nucleus of that Christian elite that Eliot was to extol soon after, inspired by the success of those exemplars of modern practical politics that lay all around. And while it claimed to pursue different objectives from those of the hard-core totalitarian parties, its true function was that of Christian cadre concerned, as Eliot expressed it in *Idea*, with 'enquiring what it [society] might be like if it took the Christian direction'. Once it had refined and fortified modern Christianity's political attitudes the Moot had a clearly social-interventionist agenda in mind. Its long-term hope for the Church was that it might assume secular clout through judicious political alignment, thereby enhancing its relevance in the postwar world under whichever combatant, democracy or fascism, might prove victorious. As Kenneth Asher puts it, the Moot 'shared with the other more notorious parties ... the belief that history, at some point, would have to be helped along'.¹¹⁸

The practical implementation of this political resolve preoccupied the Moot in all of its gatherings during the war years. Among the first names proposed for the movement were 'The Brotherhood of the Common Mind' and 'The Christian Conspiracy', no less, and in its regular newsletter the movement dropped pretence by referring to the membership as 'collaborators'. (In its early stages, it even considered such 'fifth-column' *modus operandi* as the formation of a nuclear organisational staff and secret cell units.) But the central enigma before it, whether to become a militant driver of social change (the position of members like Mannheim and also of Dawson, whose earlier Christian 'apologies' had by 1940 given way to an undisguised yearning for a totalitarian Christian regime and a Church restored to omnipotence) or to adopt more 'intellectual' means like inculcation through its pamphlet, the *Christian News-Letter* [*sic*] (which was the position of Eliot, a man who in Kojecky's words 'worked with words and ideas'), obsessed it to the point of paralysis. Eliot, perhaps mindful of the fate of *l'Action française* and its demagogue Charles Maurras who trod the right-wing path only to cross over into fascism, went with the moderates; his

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.169.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.169.

¹¹⁸ *T.S. Eliot and Ideology*, p.85.

naturally cautious temperament ruled out militancy of any stripe, and for this reason only he appears to have played a countervailing role to the more belligerent Moot elements. (Kojecky records, however, that by July 1940 `Eliot accepted in some sense Mannheim's call for "revolution from above" ', and that to the end of his involvement with the group he was writing conjectural papers for Moot discussion and numerous letters to Oldham on the issue of `Christian thinking' versus `Christian action'.)

What was interesting about the Moot and sister Christian `working parties' like the Chandos Group and the aptly named Christian Frontier Council (formed in 1942) was that the proliferation of *ad hoc* groups like these signalled a peculiarly modern division between sacred and secular, or between Christian consciousness and quotidian practice, involving the traditional forces of the clergy and the Church administration on the one hand and lay intellectuals and technocrats on the other, born of the need to shape a Church policy effective for the politically turbid mid-twentieth century. Their proceedings, conducted in the shadow of more formally-convened, but no less politically activated gatherings like the 1937 Oxford Conference, heralded a newly politicized strategy in Church policy. No longer would the teachings of scripture and the holy ministrations of the clergy be adequate to take Christianity into the modern era; it needed as well the input and counsel of lay specialists from the political and social realms. The primary impetus, it was conceived, would in fact come from such lay specialists, acting as a kind of antenna for the faith, and influencing Church policy (and ultimately, political and social policy on the national scale) from the congregational masses up.¹¹⁹

While small in numbers, the Moot was perhaps unique in the intellectual calibre of its membership, so that it became the meritocratic caucus of the nationwide Christian socio-political cadre that its ringleaders hoped would one day be counted in the `hundreds of thousands'. It deliberately limited itself to just 35 members so as to safeguard the nature of its `free and intimate' discussions. It continued to meet two to three times a year after that first April 1938 quorum and it survived until the death in 1947 of its prime motivator, Karl Mannheim. For his part, Eliot participated in its affairs until June 1943, and as Kenneth Asher reminds us its business was not just a

¹¹⁹ Notably, New Zealand had its own `Conference on Christian Order in New Zealand', held in Christchurch at war's end, 1945, under the auspices of The National Council of Churches. In its affirmations, the Conference had a boldly evangelising tone, surpassing even Eliot or the Moot in reconstitutive militancy: `The Conference affirms that *its great objective is a Christian New Zealand ... It is thus possible for a force to rise and be fostered which dominates not only the State and the economic order, but the very souls of men. Christianity could be this dynamic*' (Conference Report pp.19-20 - my emphases).

mere *doctrinal* 'rearguard action' as per the epigraph quoted at the beginning of this appendix, but a *political* one as well. As Asher says 'From the records of the Moot we know that a tiered society directed by a Christian elite was the working premise'.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ In *T.S. Eliot and Ideology*, p.89.